William Cullen Bryant

A. J. SYMINGTON

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

A Biographical Sketch

WITH

SELECTIONS FROM HIS POEMS AND OTHER WRITINGS

BY

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"SAMUEL LOVER, A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH" "THOMAS MOORE, THE POET" ETC.

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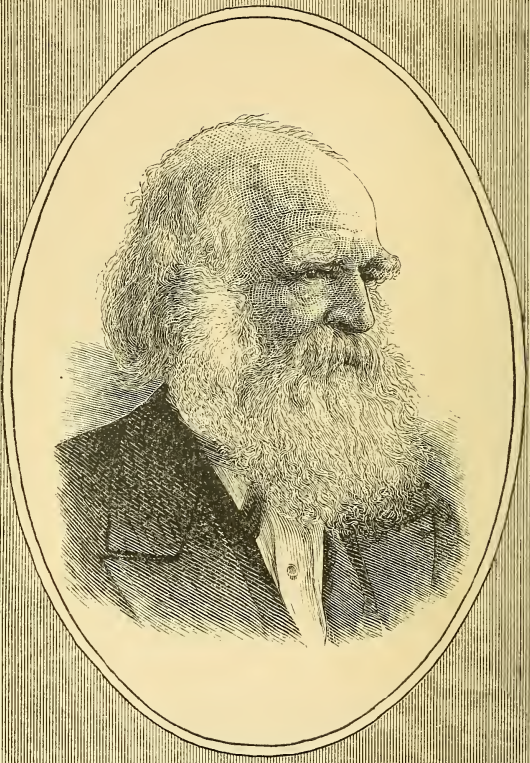

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

Published with the concurrence of the representative of the estate of the late William Cullen Bryant, and of the publishers of Mr. Bryant's works.

TO

THE HON. PAUL ANSEL CHADBOURNE, LL.D., &c. &c. &c.,

PRESIDENT OF WILLIAMS COLLEGE,

BERKSHIRE COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS,

WHICH TIME-HONOURED INSTITUTION

WAS

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT'S ALMA MATER,

THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY

HIS OLD FRIEND, AND FELLOW-TRAVELLER,

A. J. SYMINGTON.

Langside, Glasgow.

PREFACE.

In this volume we have endeavoured shortly to present the life-career, and writings, of Bryant the Poet—who was also editor, traveller, citizen, and philanthropist; and who, though younger than Dana, was, nevertheless, the patriarch of American poetical literature. Wherever possible, we have left him to speak for himself, quoting freely from his correspondence and writings, including in the former several of his letters which now appear in print for the first time.

To friends who have given us valuable aid, we acknowledge obligations; especially to General James Grant Wilson, who, having enjoyed Bryant's friendship for more than a quarter of a century, has kindly furnished us with much information regarding him both from personal and manuscript sources. We have also consulted, or quoted from, the published writings or addresses of Godwin, Bigelow, Curtis, Stedman, Stoddard, Dana, Ray Palmer, Mark Hopkins, Jones, Osgood, Bellows, Munger, Hill, Miller, and others; to each and all of whom we respectfully acknowledge indebtedness.

We earnestly hope that what we have here lovingly written of William Cullen Bryant, may induce some, who are passing by on the dusty roads of life, to drink of the clear, cool, perennial spring, which wells up, for their refreshment, in his pure and elevating poetry.

A. J. S.

Langside, Glasgow.

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WILLIAM C. BRYANT:

HIS LIFE AND WRITINGS.

CHAPTER I.

Introductory.

Hopkins on Bryant — Bryant the Foremost American Citizen — His Long Career in Literature and Politics—Stedman's Estimate of Bryant—Scribner —Curtis—Bryant honoured not only for his Works, but for his noble Christian Life.

"William Cullen Bryant," said the Rev. Dr. Mark Hopkins, the venerable ex-president of Williams College, Massachusetts, "had the wisdom of age in his youth, and the fire of youth in his age."

During a long career, as poet and journalist, although he refused official appointments, Bryant achieved the position of being accounted "the most accomplished, the most distinguished, and the most universally honoured citizen of the United States," and that, solely by his genius, moral rectitude, and force of character.

Born during the presidency of Washington, and dying under that of Hayes—a period extending from 1794 to 1878 — and in his eighty-fourth year, he was all but identified with the national life of America; while, personally, he had a large share, both in originating and elevating its literature, and in shaping the course of its politics.

Having been actively connected with the press for

more than half a century, he was a recognized power for good. Avoiding the coarseness of controversy, he advocated free-trade, and was strongly opposed to slavery. Standing in the front rank of literature, and a liberal patron of art, his high personal character as a Christian man, together with his social position, made him a prominent figure on all public occasions, when the illustrious, in genius or rank, were to be honoured. An admirable speaker, his commemorative orations are models of fine, generous, appreciative criticism, elegantly expressed in pure and terse idiomatic Saxon.

In New York, especially, that

"good gray head which all men knew"

will be sadly missed, for many a day, by those who knew him, either as poet, scholar, politician, traveller, philanthropist, or friend. In the journals of the day he had followed the various campaigns of the first Napoleon down to the battle of Waterloo; the whole careers of Louis Philippe and Louis Napoleon; and in his own country commented on the policies of twelve different presidents, and watched the rise and termination of the great conflict between the North and the South which resulted in the abolition of slavery.

The well-known early poem "Thanatopsis," which established Bryant's reputation, was written before Walter Scott began his series of the "Waverley" novels. He was in his prime when Dickens and Thackeray first began to write, and, in the full exercise of his intellectual powers, after they had passed away. Longfellow and Emerson—both old men—gratefully recognized him as a master; and one of them lately publicly acknowledged him as his earliest teacher in the art of verse. "He was my master in verse," said Longfellow, "ten years and more my senior,

and throughout my whole life I have had the warmest reverential regard for him. His first little, thin volume of poems, of thirty pages or so, containing his 'Thanatopsis' and other youthful performances, lies on my study table to-day." "It is certain," said Emerson, "that Mr. Bryant has written some of the very best poetry that we have had in America." He loved to see him walk the streets, so erect for his years; and, admiring his scholarship and independent spirit in literature and politics, he particularly emphasized his admiration for "so manly a man!" The extent of the period during which he flourished was so great, that, beginning to write in the early springtime of Wordsworth, he long outlived new men, such as Edgar Allan Poe. It is certain, that no ordinary man could have gained and retained to the last, as Bryant did, such an extraordinary hold upon human interest, affection, and reverential esteem; not only from the general public, but from the most thoughtful and refined of his contemporaries. What were the qualities, it may be asked, which gave Bryant this special eminence? "Not alone," answers Edmund Clarence Stedman, "that he was a wise, good, virtuous man; not that he was a patriot, in the deepest and broadest sense; not that he was a journalist, however strong and notable; not that merely he was a clear and vigorous writer or original sayer and thinker; nor even because he was a serene and reverend old man, most sound of body and mind. True, he was all these, and in their combination occupied a rank excelled by none and attained only by the excepted few. But, beyond and including all these, he was a POET, . . . joining for us the traditional gravity, purity, and patriotic wisdom of the forefathers with the modernness and freshness of our own day. His life, public and private, was in exact keeping with his speech and writings. . . . Always, he

held in view liberty, law, wisdom, piety, and faith. . . . Grave, yet full of shrewd and kindly humour, absolute simplicity characterized him. . . . His intellectual faculties, like his physical, were balanced to the discreetest level, and this without abasing his poetic fire. His genius was not shown by the advance of one faculty and the impediment of others; it was the spirit of an even combination, and a fine one."

In its editorial department, "Topics of the Time," *Scribner's Monthly Magazine* says:—

"By reason of his venerable age, his unquestioned genius, his pure and lofty character, his noble achievements in letters, his great influence as a public journalist, and his position as a pioneer in American literature, William Cullen Bryant had become, without a suspicion of the fact in his own modest thought, the principal citizen of the great republic. By all who knew him and by millions who never saw him he was held in the most affectionate reverence. When he died, therefore, and was buried from sight, he left a sense of personal loss in all worthy American hearts. . . .

"Mr. Bryant's character was so broadly built, it was made up of such a wide range of the best material, it was so true and pure, and so mellowed by age and religion, that it was, after all, more admirable and memorable than anything he ever did. His poetry has already become classic in American literature, but his memory, as it lives in the popular heart, only recognizes his genius as incidental to his nature, and his poetical works as a single feature of his career. He was a great man every way—great in his gifts, great in his religious faith, great in his works, great in his symmetry, great in his practical handling of the things of personal, social, and political life, great in his experience of life, great in his wisdom, great in his goodness and sweetness, and great in his modesty and simplicity."

George William Curtis, too, in his Commemorative

Address on the life, character, and writings of William Cullen Bryant, delivered before the New York Historical Society, at the Academy of Music, on December 30th, 1878, said:—"A patriarch of our literature, and in a permanent sense the oldest of our poets, a scholar familiar with many languages and literatures, finely sensitive to the influence of nature, and familiar with trees and birds and flowers, he was especially fitted, it might be thought, for scholarly seclusion and the delights of the strict literary life. But he who melodiously marked the solitary way of the water-fowl through the rosy depth of the glowing heaven, and on the lonely New England hills,

'Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun,'

saw in the river and valley, in forest and ocean, only the solemn decoration of man's tomb—the serious, musing country boy felt also the magic of human sympathy, the impulse of his country, the political genius of his race, and the poet became distinctively an American, and a public political leader. In the active American life of this century, he bore his full part, never quailing, never doubting, giving and taking blows; stern often, reserved, unsparing, but panoplied ever in an armour which no fabled Homeric hero wore, beyond the art of Vulcan to forge, or the dark waters of the Styx to charm, the impenetrable armour of moral principle. Time, as it passed, chastened the ardour of the partisan, without relaxing the vital interest of the citizen in public affairs. His lofty personality rose above the clamour of selfish ambition, and, in his life, he reconciled, both in fact and to the popular imagination the seeming incompatibility, of literary taste and accomplishment and superiority, with constant political activity. So rises the shining dome of Mont Blanc above the clustering forests and the

roaring streams, and, on its towering sides the growths of various climates and of different zones, in due order, meet and mingle."

Thus, is Bryant deservedly honoured by those who are most capable of appreciating what is pure and high-minded in poetry and life; for he himself was one who, to the last, with humble Christian faith, earnestly strove to act up to that injunction, so beautifully expressed, in the following lines from "Thanatopsis," his own youthful, yet mature, poem:—

> "So live, that when thy summons comes to join
> The innumerable caravan that moves
> To the pale realms of shade, where each shall take
> His chamber in the silent halls of death,
> Thou go not like the quarry-slave, at night,
> Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
> By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
> Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
> About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

CHAPTER II.

1794–1806: Birth, Parentage, and Early Days.

Birthplace—Pilgrim-Father Descent—His Father a Physician—Why Named William Cullen—His Mother—Watts' Hymns—The Boys of My Boyhood—Discipline—Entertainments—Books—Botanical Strolls—Love of Nature—Poem, The Rivulet.

William Cullen Bryant was born at Cummington, Hampshire county, Massachusetts, on 3d November, 1794, in a small log-house, and not, as is generally said, in the old gambrel-roofed building known as the Bryant homestead. The adjacent small house, which was con-

structed of square logs, has long been removed, and not a trace of it is now to be seen.

But the same broad landscape, which the boy saw, remains; and, although somewhat modified by cultivation since these days, still furnishes the key to many of the allusions in his poems.

"The Bryant Homestead, owned at the day of his death by the poet, is situated in the grand hill-country of Western Massachusetts. The summits of the hills are still covered with dark, waving forests, and gray rocks gleam out here and there from their shadowed sides. Along the slopes, well-tilled farm-lands stretch away to the rushing streams that have cut down deep into the narrow valleys between the hills.

> 'Thou wilt find nothing here
> Of all that pained thee in the haunts of men,
> And made thee loathe thy life.'

"From these hills and woods and streams, the poet drank in that deep, pure love of Nature that breathes through his noblest lines."

Through the Pilgrim Fathers, who landed from the *Mayflower* on the 22d of December, 1620, Bryant was descended from the English and Scotch families of Alden, Ames, Harris, Hayward, Howard, Keith, Mitchell, Packard, Snell, and Washburn.

"Bryant," says General James Grant Wilson, the intimate friend of the poet, "also had a worthy clerical ancestor in the person of James Keith, the first minister of Bridgewater, Massachusetts, who, after having preached from the same pulpit fifty-six years, died in that town in 1719.

"Stephen Bryant, the first of the poet's American ancestors of his own name, who is known to have been

at Plymouth, Massachusetts, as early as 1632, and who, some time before 1650, married Abigail Shaw, had several children, one of whom was also named Stephen. He was the father of Ichabod Bryant, who moved from Raynham to West Bridgewater in 1745, bringing with him a certificate of dismission from the church at Raynham, and a recommendation to that of his new place of residence. Philip, the eldest of his five sons, studied medicine, and settled in North Bridgewater, now Brockton, where his house is still standing. Dr. Philip Bryant married Silence Howard, daughter of Dr. Abiel Howard, with whom he studied medicine. One of their nine children, a son called Peter, born in the year 1767, studied his father's profession, and succeeded to his practice. At that time there lived in the same town a revolutionary veteran, 'stern and severe,' named Ebenezer Snell, of whom a small boy of the period, still living, informs the writer that 'all the boys of Bridgewater were dreadfully afraid,' so austere and authoritative were his manners. The old soldier had a pretty daughter who won the susceptible young doctor's affections, so that when Squire Snell removed with his family to Cummington, and built what is now known as the 'Bryant Homestead,' Peter Bryant followed, establishing himself there as a physician and surgeon, and in 1792 was married to 'sweet Sarah Snell,' as she is called in one of the youthful doctor's poetic effusions. Five sons and two daughters were the fruit of this happy marriage, their second son being the subject of this sketch. Of these seven children but two sons survive, Arthur, and John Howard Bryant, of Illinois, who were present at the poet's funeral."

Their home, at Cummington, among the Hampshire Hills, was, "where the first pioneer had built his cabin scarcely thirty years before, and there, in 1794, Bryant

was born. Western Massachusetts is a high hill country, with secluded green valleys—a farming and grazing region, but every little stream turns a mill, and, along the water-courses, the air hums with the music of a various industry. The great hills are still largely covered with woods that shelter the solitary pastures and upland farms; woods beautiful in spring with the white laurel and azalea, ringing through the short summer with the song of the hermit thrush and the full-choired music of New England birds, and in autumn blazing with scarlet and gold of the changing leaf, until the cold splendour of the snowy winter closes the year."

"Mrs. Bryant," says an editorial associate in the *Evening Post*, "who was a lineal descendant of Miles Standish's lieutenant, John Alden, was a woman of great force of character, which manifested itself in her dignified bearing, and in the unyielding quality of such convictions as she saw fit to express. Her loathing for a drunkard was equalled only by her detestation of a liar. In all her household management she displayed an energy which indicated, as clearly as did her physical features, the stock from which she had sprung. Like most women in her day, her school education extended no further than the ordinary English branches, and all the knowledge she possessed, beyond that point, was the result of reading, an occupation in which she took great pleasure."

"Dr. Bryant," says the same authority, "is described as having been of medium height, broad-shouldered, and with a well-knit frame; he took great pride in his muscular strength. His manners were uncommonly gentle and reserved, and his disposition serene, yet he was very fond of society. His election to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, for several terms, and afterward to the State Senate, gave him a cause for visiting Boston very

often, and associating with the cultured literary circle whom he met there. When not engaged in legislative matters, too, he would make it a point to attend the annual meeting of the Medical Society, which was held in Boston, and the letters written to his wife, during these intervals of recreation, breathe a spirit of the purest enjoyment. His fondness for humorous composition of all sorts, and for amusing verses in particular, was a marked trait, and, for the gratification of this taste, he was enabled to draw on the literature of two languages, having passed a part of his early life on the Isle of France, acting as surgeon of a merchant ship. In dress the doctor was always scrupulously neat; he followed the Boston fashions, moreover, with enough care, even in his village home, to give an observer the impression that he was a city gentleman visiting the country for a holiday jaunt."

General James Grant Wilson, in his memoir of Bryant prefixed to the poet's *New Library of Poetry and Song*, adds:—"Dr. Peter Bryant's bearing, I am told by an aged man who remembers him, was the very reverse of that of his gruff father-in-law. Although reserved, he was gentle in manner, with a low soft voice, and always attired with scrupulous neatness. While not above the height of his gifted son, he was broad-shouldered, and would sometimes exhibit his great strength by lifting a barrel of cider from the ground over the wheel into a wagon. According to the account of another who knew him, he was 'possessed of extensive literary and scientific acquirements, an unusually vigorous and well-disciplined mind, and an elegant and refined taste.'"

A man of rare intelligence, taste, and sagacity—a practising physician and surgeon, and one of the third generation who had followed that profession—it was, for long, the dream of Dr. Peter Bryant's life to educate a child of

his own for his favourite profession. So he named his boy William Cullen, after Dr. Cullen, an eminent physician and medical authority, whose lectures he admired, and who had died in Edinburgh only four years before. However, neither William, who was so delicate an infant that there then seemed little chance of his growing up, nor any of his brothers had any liking for the healing art, and so it turned out that Dr. Peter Bryant had no lineal heir to his medical practice.

"The poet's mother," we are told, "was a lady of personal dignity and excellent good sense." Although her education was limited to the branches then taught in common schools, she certainly possessed those qualities of heart that make home happy and life beautiful. When a little child, she taught him to repeat Watts' hymns, and, ever after, Bryant not only regarded them with affection, but in mature years often expressed admiration for Watts' poetic genius. In this connection the following article will be read with interest:—

"I have liked Dr. Watts' psalms and hymns," said Mr. Bryant, "ever since the time when, scarcely three years old, I was made to repeat, with his book in my hand, and with such gestures as were prescribed to me, the psalm beginning with the words:—

" 'Come, sound his praise abroad,
And hymns of glory sing.'

"The critics generally have shown but stinted favour to Dr. Watts' devotional poetry. Dr. Johnson pronounced it unsatisfactory, though he admits that he 'has done better than anybody else, what nobody has done well.' I maintain, for my part, that Dr. Watts has done admirably well what he undertook to do, and the proof, if I wanted any other than the pleasure with which I always read him, I find in the strong hold which his devotional verses have taken on the hearts of men in all conditions of life, and, I think, all

varieties of religious belief. No compilation of hymns for the public worship of any denomination is ever made without borrowing largely from Dr. Watts. He has been in his grave for considerably more than a century, yet have his psalms and hymns lost none of the favour which they had when they were first used by religious assemblies, and, I believe, are even now in greater esteem than ever, notwithstanding that such poets as Doddridge, Cowper, Charles Wesley, and Heber have written devotional verses of very great merit since his time.

"The secret of his popularity lies, as it seems to me, in the union of strong feeling with great poetic merit. In what he wrote there are occasionally transgressions against good taste, as in the versification of Solomon's Song. There are also some slovenly lines, and even stanzas; but there is always great fervour and profound devotion. No poet has ever expressed religious emotions with greater appropriateness. He faints and languishes for the Divine presence, he deplores the waywardness of the human heart, he exults in the Divine favour, he is awed by the Divine majesty, he looks with transport on the works of the Divine hand, he dwells with delight on the vision of a better life beyond the grave; and all these moods of mind find full expression in his verse. Many of his hymns seem to have been dashed off in the excitement of the moment, as if the feeling which had taken possession of him could not be satisfied without expressing itself in poetic forms. His versions of the Hebrew psalms are as remarkable, for this, as the compositions which he called hymns. He seems to have first filled his mind with the imagery of the ancient bard, and, catching inspiration from him, flung his thought upon the page, in a form suited to the more mild and perfect dispensation of Christianity. Some of Dr. Watts' devotional verses show that he possessed imagination in a high degree. What a beautiful picture, for example, is set before us in the hymn beginning

"'There is a land of pure delight!'

"In this hymn we have the green fields of immortal life, with their unwithering flowers lying in perpetual light; the narrow river of death, dividing it from the present state of

being, and a timorous crowd of mortals on the hither bank shivering and shuddering at the thought of passing through those cold waters. I once heard a distinguished literary gentleman instance the following couplet from one of Watts' hymns, as conveying to the mind images which could only occur to a poet of no common genius:—

> "'Cold mountains and the midnight air
> Witnessed the fervour of his prayer.'

"I was able to match them, or nearly so, with a stanza from his version of the one hundred and twenty-first Psalm:—

> "'No sun shall smite thy head by day,
> Nor the pale moon with sickly ray
> Shall blast thy couch; no baleful star
> Dart his malignant fire so far.'

"How pathetic is this expostulation, in the one hundred and second Psalm:—

> "'Spare us, O Lord! aloud we pray;
> Nor let our sun go down at noon;
> Thy years are one eternal day,
> And must thy children die so soon?'

"How magnificently is the one hundredth Psalm versified, closing with this grand stanza:—

> "'We'll crowd thy gates with thankful songs,
> High as the heavens our voices raise;
> And earth, with her ten thousand tongues,
> Shall fill thy courts with sounding praise!'"

In his autobiographic poem, "A Lifetime," written when the scenes of childhood were recollections of a remote past, Bryant pictures himself standing by his mother's knee, and

> "Reading of ancient peoples
> And realms beyond the sea;
>
> "Of the cruel king of Egypt
> Who made God's people slaves,

And perished with all his army,
Drowned in the Red-Sea waves;

"Of Deborah, who mustered
Her brethren long oppressed,
And routed the heathen army,
And gave her people rest;

"And the sadder, gentler story,—
How Christ, the crucified,
With a prayer for those who slew him,
Forgave them as he died."

In an article called "The Boys of my Boyhood," which was written for the *St. Nicholas* magazine, and published in December, 1876, Bryant has happily told us the story of his boyish days, better than any one else could possibly have done.

Of the domestic discipline of these days, and of the awe in which he stood of his grandfather, under whose roof he and his parents resided, he says:—

"The boys of the generation to which I belonged—that is to say, who were born in the last years of the last century or the earliest of this—were brought up under a system of discipline which put a far greater distance between parents and their children than now exists. The parents seemed to think this necessary, in order to secure obedience. They were believers in the old maxim that familiarity breeds contempt. My own parents lived in the house with my grandfather and grandmother on the mother's side. My grandfather was a disciplinarian of the stricter sort, and I can hardly find words to express the awe in which I stood of him—an awe so great as almost to prevent anything like affection on my part, although he was in the main kind, and, certainly, never thought of being severe, beyond what was necessary to maintain a proper degree of order in the family.

"The other boys in that part of the country, my schoolmates and play-fellows, were educated on the same system.

Yet there were at that time some indications that this very severe discipline was beginning to relax. With my father and mother I was on much easier terms than with my grandfather. If a favour was to be asked of my grandfather it was asked with fear and trembling; the request was postponed to the last moment, and then made with hesitation and blushes and a confused utterance.

"One of the means of keeping the boys of that generation in order was a little bundle of birchen rods, bound together by a small cord, and generally suspended on a nail against the wall in the kitchen. This was esteemed as much a part of the necessary furniture as the crane that hung in the kitchen fireplace, or the shovel and tongs. It sometimes happened, that the boy suffered a fate similar to that of the eagle in the fable, wounded by an arrow fledged with a feather from his own wing; in other words, the boy was made to gather the twigs intended for his own castigation."

He also tells us, of the respect then paid by the young to their seniors, especially to ministers of the gospel. Of the visits they paid to the district schools, on which occasions the scholars were dressed in their Sunday clothes; of the examinations through which children were put on the questions in the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly of Divines; and then of the usual winding-up stereotyped address; all of which reads like an account of the good old customs prevailing in Scotland in the days of Dr. Chalmers and Dr. Guthrie's boyhood.

The influence of the clergy also, in some degree, extended to the populace. Although there were then no temperance societies in existence, excess was regarded as a reproach; and the man who was overtaken by drunkenness, if the minister should appear, says Bryant, "was generally glad to slink out of sight."

Of the gatherings and amusements of his young days,

many of which are still to be met with in New England, he describes the entertainments, called "raisings," on the erection of the timber frames of houses or barns; the making of "maple sugar;" the social meetings called "huskings," when the neighbours met to strip the ears of maize from their husk; the cheerful "apple-parings," which on autumn evenings brought together the young of both sexes to prepare the usual annual supply of apple sauce from the fruit of the orchards; the "cider-making" season, which corresponded somewhat with the vintage time in the wine countries of Europe; "angling," which Bryant in boyish days enjoyed, but says that he had long been weaned from the propensity, now no longer calling it "sport," but regarding it as "a remnant of the original wild nature of man."

There were, then, no public lectures on subjects of general interest, but Bryant gives us some curious information regarding church-going — then, generally, three times a day—and about the extinct office of the tything-men—whose duty it was to look after the good behaviour of the young folks in church, and to wake up anybody who chanced to fall asleep.

Of the books to which he had access, eighty years ago, he tells us, some were excellent, and some mere trash or worse; amongst the good he names *Sandford and Merton*, *Robinson Crusoe*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Mrs. Barbauld, Miss Edgeworth's *Evenings at Home*, Watts, and Cowper's Poems.

After thus fondly recalling and commenting on the days of his boyhood, the veteran who had been trained under such influences, finding so many things changed, and taking commendable pride in positions achieved by his former playmates,—whether as professors, founders of useful societies, missionaries, or millionaires,—in the spirit

of wholesome conservatism, thus concludes his interesting paper:—

"Whatever may have been the merits or the shortcomings of the generation to which these men belonged, they are now with the past, and it is yet to be seen whether the different system now adopted in training the youth of our country will give it a better class of citizens."

William Cullen Bryant from an early period displayed a taste for reading and study. He himself has told us the books he then delighted to pore over. His father, a man of refined taste, who devoted much attention to the mental culture of his family, soon directed him to the books which he himself liked to read—Pope, and Gray, and Goldsmith—and his son began to echo their music.

The free and happy surroundings of a rough country farm gave him physical and mental strength; while the varied and picturesque scenery of Hampshire, with its hills and dales, woods and streams, familiarized him from childhood with nature, and taught him to love her under all her varied aspects.

In his strolls as well as in his studies he profited greatly from the companionship of his father.

"Dr. Bryant's scientific attainments," we are told, "were not limited to an acquaintance with the phials and retorts of his laboratory. In the open fields he was equally at home; and his son, in twilight strolls along the country roads, and talks at noonday under the big trees near the homestead, drew from him those first lessons in botany which were so expanded by later research as to embrace the whole field of organic but inanimate nature."

The stern and rigid qualities of his grandfather, old Ebenezer Snell, as described in the paragraph quoted from the *St. Nicholas* magazine, would doubtless tend to

enhance the boy's love of out-door life, and make him value the unrestricted air of freedom which he could enjoy in his intercourse with nature.

That the mountains, woods, rivers, birds, and flowers were dear to him, and, from early days downwards, served as types wherewith to print thoughts, is very evident from his constant references to the distinctive scenery of his beautiful Hampshire home, as in the following stanzas:—

"And deep were my musings in life's early blossom,
'Mid the twilight of mountain-groves wandering long:
How thrilled my young veins, and how throbbed my full bosom,
When o'er me descended the spirit of song!!

"'Mong the deep-cloven fells that for ages had listened,
To the rush of the pebble-paved river between,
Where the kingfisher screamed, and gray precipice glistened,
All breathless with awe have I gazed on the scene,

"Till I felt the dark power o'er my reveries stealing
From the gloom of the thicket that over me hung,
And the thoughts that awoke in that rapture of feeling
Were formed into verse as they rose to my tongue."

Richard Henry Stoddard has said of Bryant:—

"The spirit of personal recollection which animated the fluent numbers of 'Green River' sparkles with youthful light in 'The Rivulet,' which reflects the early life of the poet at Cummington. The waters of Helicon never bubbled more musically than the waters of this nameless little rill."

We append this exquisite poem, which, although produced at a later time, refers to the period of which we have been speaking:—

THE RIVULET.

This little rill, that from the springs
Of yonder grove its current brings,
Plays on the slope awhile, and then
Goes prattling into groves again,
Oft to its warbling waters drew
My little feet, when life was new.
When woods in early green were dressed,
And from the chambers of the west
The warmer breezes, travelling out,
Breathed the new scent of flowers about,
My truant steps from home would stray,
Upon its grassy side to play,
List the brown thrasher's vernal hymn,
And crop the violet on its brim,
With blooming cheek and open brow,
As young and gay, sweet rill, as thou.

And when the days of boyhood came,
And I had grown in love with fame,
Duly I sought thy banks, and tried
My first rude numbers by thy side.
Words cannot tell how bright and gay
The scenes of life before me lay.
Then glorious hopes, that now to speak
Would bring the blood into my cheek,
Passed o'er me; and I wrote, on high,
A name I deemed should never die.

Years change thee not. Upon yon hill
The tall old maples, verdant still,
Yet tell, in grandeur of decay,
How swift the years have passed away,
Since first, a child, and half afraid,
I wandered in the forest shade.
Thou, ever-joyous rivulet,
Dost dimple, leap, and prattle yet;
And sporting with the sands that pave

The windings of thy silver wave,
And dancing to thy own wild chime,
Thou laughest at the lapse of time.
The same sweet sounds are in my ear
My early childhood loved to hear;
As pure thy limpid waters run;
As bright they sparkle to the sun;
As fresh and thick the bending ranks
Of herbs that line thy oozy banks;
The violet there, in soft May dew,
Comes up, as modest and as blue;
As green amid thy current's stress,
Floats the scarce-rooted watercress:
And the brown ground-bird, in thy glen,
Still chirps as merrily as then.

Thou changest not—but I am changed
Since first thy pleasant banks I ranged;
And the grave stranger, come to see
The play-place of his infancy,
Has scarce a single trace of him
Who sported once upon thy brim.
The visions of my youth are past—
Too bright, too beautiful to last.
I've tried the world—it wears no more
The colouring of romance it wore.
Yet well has nature kept the truth
She promised in my earliest youth.
The radiant beauty shed abroad
On all the glorious works of God,
Shows freshly, to my sobered eye,
Each charm it wore in days gone by.

Yet a few years shall pass away,
And I, all trembling, weak, and gray,
Bowed to the earth, which waits to fold
My ashes in the embracing mould,
(If haply the dark will of Fate
Indulge my life so long a date),

May come for the last time to look
Upon my childhood's favourite brook.
Then dimly on my eye shall gleam
The sparkle of thy dancing stream;
And faintly on my ear shall fall
Thy prattling current's merry call;
Yet shalt thou flow as glad and bright
As when thou met'st my infant sight.

And I shall sleep—and on thy side,
As ages after ages glide,
Children their early sports shall try,
And pass to hoary age and die.
But thou, unchanged from year to year,
Gaily shalt play and glitter here;
Amid young flowers and tender grass
Thy endless infancy shall pass;
And, singing down thy narrow glen,
Shalt mock the fading race of men.

CHAPTER III.

1806–1811: The Boy-Poet and Student Days.

His Father's Judicious Aid in his Poetical Studies—Bryant Precocious—Early Verses—The Embargo—It Reaches a Second Edition—The Genius of Columbia—Latin and Greek—General Information—Williams College—Student Life—His Name honoured at Williams—The College and Mission Park at Williamstown—Scenery of the Hoosac Valley.

Dr. Peter Bryant devoted much attention to the mental culture of his family; and, fortunately, soon recognizing the peculiar gift of his son William, he judiciously and sympathetically aided in its development. An able and skilful instructor, he kindly chastened and improved, while encouraging, the first rude efforts of his boyish genius.

A personal friend of the poet thus wrote of him, in 1840:—"His father, his guide in the first attempts at versification, taught him the value of correctness and compression, and enabled him to distinguish between true poetic enthusiasm and fustian."

To this teaching and training by his father, Bryant, afterwards, thus alluded in a poem entitled, "Hymn to Death," published in 1825, and which is often quoted for its pathos and beauty:—

> "Alas! I little thought that the stern power,
> Whose fearful praise I sang, would try me thus
> Before the strain was ended. It must cease—
> For he is in his grave who taught my youth
> The art of verse, and in the bud of life
> Offered me to the Muses. Oh, cut off
> Untimely! when thy reason in its strength,
> Ripened by years of toil and studious search,
> And watch of nature's silent lessons, taught
> Thy hand to practise best the lenient art
> To which thou gavest thy laborious days,
> And, last, thy life. . . .
>
> "Now thou art not—and yet the men whose guilt
> Has wearied Heaven for vengeance—he who bears
> False witness—he who takes the orphan's bread,
> And robs the widow—he who spreads abroad
> Polluted hands in mockery of prayer,
> Are left to cumber earth."

General James Grant Wilson tells us:—"The poet's great-grandfather, Dr. Abiel Howard, a graduate of Harvard College of the class of 1729, had an extensive library, for those times, and in his youth wrote verses. Some of these were in Mr. Bryant's possession, and, to quote his own words, 'show no small power of poetic expression.' The inclination to express themselves in poetic form

reappeared in Dr. Howard's grandchildren. Dr. Bryant wrote many songs and love stanzas in his younger days, and some satirical political poems in middle age. His sister Ruth Bryant, who died young, left behind several meritorious poems which her nephew had read in manuscript. When Mr. Bryant was studying law, the late Judge Daniel Howard asked him from whom he inherited his poetic gift; he promptly replied, from his great-grandfather, Dr. Howard. One of the poet's surviving brothers recently said to the writer, 'We are all addicted, more or less, to the unprofitable business of rhyming.'"

Bryant was precocious; and, although his very earliest boyish efforts in verse were, to some extent, echoes of book-lore, or of his father's opinions, while his own direct, intimate, and characteristic converse with nature was not, as yet, developed, as it shortly afterwards was in his "Thanatopsis," yet there is this remarkable difference between his early efforts, and those of other poets, such as Tasso, Cowley, Pope, Chatterton, or Byron, who indited youthful verses, that Bryant's lines have nothing forced, morbid, or immature about them; and he wrote as if he had already actually attained to experience; while, dating from "Thanatopsis"—natural, flowing, and felicitous in thought and expression, and perhaps the most wonderful poem ever written by a youth—his poetical powers, thus early developed, remained unimpaired to an age beyond that usually allotted to man. "Thanatopsis" was written in his eighteenth year; and the noble "Ode" written for Washington's birth-day, February 22d, 1878, in his eighty-fourth. Hence, John Bigelow, in his address before the Century Club when holding a Memorial Service, in November, 1878, the year of Bryant's death, justly said:—"No one will deny that in one respect, at least, Bryant's fame was entirely unique. He was the

author of the finest verses ever produced by any one so young, and so old, as the author of 'Thanatopsis,' and of 'The Twenty-second of February.'"

He wrote verses when he was nine years of age; and his first contribution to the press was, to quote his own words, "a school exercise in verse which was published in the *Hampshire Gazette*, printed at Northampton, Mass." This was in his tenth year. His Latin translations, which are usually said to have been his first appearance in print, were not executed for some time after, the interval being at least a year. Modestly, the boy continued for years studying and writing; and, to test his progress, occasionally sent his compositions to editors, either anonymously or under signatures not likely to identify him.

The following lines are taken from one of his early school exercises:—

"Thanks to the preacher whose discernment true,
Upholds religion to the mental view;
Unfolds to us instruction's ample page,
Rich with the fruits of every distant age;
Pours simple truths, by love divine refin'd,
With force resistless on the youthful mind.
Thanks to the gentlemen assembled here,
To see what progress we have made this year,
In learning's paths, our footsteps to survey,
And trace our passage up the sloping way.
And thanks to Heaven, the first and best of all,
The auditor of ev'ry humble call—
That (tho' a few have fall'n behind the rest,)
So much improvement has our studies blest.
And since I am to serious thoughts inclined,
Now to the scholars I'll address my mind;
A word or two, in which myself may bear
If not a greater, yet an equal share.
My comrades! tho' we're not a num'rous train,

'Tis doubtful whether we shall meet again;
For death's cold hand may aim th' unerring blow,
And lay, with heavy stroke, the victim low;
From this frail state, th' unbody'd soul will fly,
And sink to hell, or soar above the sky.
Then let us tread, as lowly Jesus trod,
The path that leads the sinner to his God;
Keep Heaven's bright mansions ever in our eyes,
Press tow'rds the mark and seize the glorious prize."

Having imbibed his father's Federal views of politics, when the people of New England feared the destruction of their commerce from the recommendation of President Jefferson that an embargo should be laid upon all vessels owned by citizens of the United States, the boy Bryant, though only in his thirteenth year, caught the very spirit of the hour, and wrote a poem which was printed in a thin pamphlet of twelve pages, with the following title:—"*The Embargo; or, Sketches of the Times.* A Satire. By a Youth of Thirteen. Boston: Printed for the Purchasers. 1808." Although all the local and transient circumstances, which then gave it point, are wanting, many portions of it read as if written of the events of yesterday, for human nature is the same, and history repeats itself. It shows how skilfully the boy-poet had mastered the art of versification; and also indicates the strong and early bias of his mind towards politics, to which, as a newspaper editor, he afterwards conscientiously devoted the greater portion of his life.

The poem, which is in rhymed pentameters, opens thus:—

"Look where we will, and in whatever land,
Europe's rich soil, or Afric's barren sand,
Where the wild savage hunts his wilder prey,
Or art and science pour their brightest day,

The monster, *Vice*, appears before our eyes,
In naked impudence, or gay disguise.

"But quit the meaner game, indignant Muse,
And to thy country turn thy nobler views;
Ill-fated clime! condemned to feel th' extremes
O' a weak ruler's philosophic dreams;
Driven headlong on to ruin's fateful brink,
When will thy country feel—when will she think!

"Satiric Muse, shall injured Commerce weep
Her ravish'd rites, and will thy thunders sleep;
Dart thy keen glances, knit thy threat'ning brows,
Call fire from heaven to blast thy country's foes.
Oh! let a youth thine inspiration learn—
Oh! give him 'words that breathe and thoughts that burn!'

"Curse of our nation, source of countless woes,
From whose dark womb unreckon'd misery flows:
Th' Embargo rages, like a sweeping wind,
Fear lowers before, and famine stalks behind."

After tracing the evils which Jefferson's policy would bring directly upon

"COMMERCE, that bears the trident of the main,
And AGRICULTURE, empress of the plain,"

the "Youth of Thirteen" proceeds to show what a great danger threatens the republic as an indirect result:—

"How foul a blot Columbia's glory stains!
How dark the scene!—infatuation reigns!
For French intrigue, which wheedles to devour,
Threatens to fix us in Napoleon's power;
Anon within th' insatiate vortex whirl'd,
Whose wide periphery involves the world.

"Oh, Heaven defend! as future seasons roll,
These western climes from Bonaparte's control;

Preserve our freedom, and our rights secure,
While truth subsists and virtue shall endure!

. . . . . .

"Columbians, wake! Evade the deep-laid snare!
Insensate! Shall we ruin court, and fall
Slaves to the proud autocrator of Gaul?
Our laws laid prostrate by his ruthless hand,
And independence banished from our land!"

Further on he addresses Jefferson as follows:—

"And thou, the scorn of every patriot name,
Thy country's ruin and her council's shame!
Poor servile thing! derision of the brave!
Who erst from Tarleton fled to Carter's cave;
Thou, who, when menac'd by perfidious Gaul,
Didst prostrate to her whisker'd minion fall;
And when our cash her empty bags supply'd,
Didst meanly strive the foul disgrace to hide;
Go, wretch, resign the presidential chair,
Disclose thy secret measures, foul or fair.
Go, search with curious eye for horned frogs,
Mid the wild wastes of Louisianian bogs;
Or, where Ohio rolls his turbid stream,
Dig for huge bones, thy glory and thy theme
Go, scan, Philosophist, thy . . . charms,
And sink supinely in her sable arms;
But quit to abler hands the helm of state,
Nor image ruin on thy country's fate."

However, the embargo was removed in 1809; the excitement abated, the country was not ruined, and President Jefferson did not resign. We give one more spirited extract, which shows that, in certain phases of political life, times are not yet much changed for the better:—

"E'en while I sing, see Faction urge her claim,
Mislead with falsehood, and with zeal inflame;

Lift her black banner, spread her empire wide,
And stalk triumphant with a fury's stride.
She blows her brazen trump, and at the sound
A motley throng, obedient, flock around;
A mist of changing hue o'er all she flings,
And darkness perches on her dragon wings!

"As Johnson deep, as Addison refin'd,
And skill'd to pour conviction o'er the mind,
Oh, might some patriot rise! the gloom dispel,
Chase Error's mist, and break her magic spell!

"But vain the wish, for hark! the murmuring meed
Of hoarse applause from yonder shed proceed;
Enter, and view the thronging concourse there,
Intent, with gaping mouth and stupid stare;
While, in the midst, their supple leader stands,
Harangues aloud, and flourishes his hands;
To adulation tunes his servile throat,
And sues, successful, for each blockhead's vote."

This poem attracted general notice, and was commended for its literary vigour, even by opponents who held democratic views. In a few months a second edition was called for, which was published in Boston and contained some additional juvenile poems, such as "The Reward of Literary Merit," "Drought," and several poetical "Enigmas," written in 1807; "The Spanish Revolution," "The Contented Ploughman," and an "Ode on the Connecticut River," written in 1808, and a "Translation from Horace" (lib. i. car. xxii.) without date. To the volume was prefixed a curious advertisement, dated February, 1809, saying—that some doubts having been expressed as to the authorship, the printer, if required, would give the names of friends who could vouch that the poem was written by a youth of thirteen.

In the following year, the aspect of public affairs having

become more tranquil, young Bryant contributed the following poem to the *Hampshire Gazette:*—

THE GENIUS OF COLUMBIA.

Far in the regions of the west,
On throne of adamant upraised,
Bright on whose polished sides impressed,
The sun's meridian splendours blazed,

Columbia's Genius sat and eyed
The eastern despot's dire career;
And thus with independent pride,
She spoke and bade the nations hear.

"Go, favoured son of glory, go!
Thy dark, aspiring aims pursue!
The blast of domination blow,
Earth's wide extended regions through!

"Though Austria, twice subjected, own
The thunders of thy conquering hand,
And tyranny erect her throne
In hapless Sweden's fallen land!

"Yet know, a nation lives, whose soul
Regards thee with disdainful eye;
Undaunted scorns thy proud control,
And dares thy swarming hordes defy;

"Unshaken as their native rocks
Its hardy sons heroic rise;
Prepared to meet thy fiercest shocks,
Protected by the favouring skies.

"Their fertile plains and woody hills
Are fanned by freedom's purest gales!
And her celestial presence fills
The deepening glens and spacious vales."

She speaks; through all her listening bands
A loud applauding murmur flies;

Fresh valour nerves their willing hands,
And lights with joy their glowing eyes!

Then should Napoleon's haughty pride
Wake on our shores the fierce affray;
Grim terror lowering at his side,
Attendant on his furious way!

With quick repulse, his baffled band
Would seek the friendly shore in vain,
Bright justice lift her red right hand,
And crush them on the fatal plain.

W. C. B.

Cummington, January 8, 1810.

When about fourteen years of age, he had begun the study of Latin with his uncle, the Rev. Dr. Thomas Snell, who was for sixty-four years pastor of the North Parish of Brookfield. Bryant resided for a year with him while studying. After that, at fifteen, he commenced Greek with the Rev. Moses Hallock, of Plainfield, Massachusetts, who prepared him for college. At the end of two months young Bryant had read through the New Testament.

For his board in these days he only paid one dollar per week, Mr. Hallock insisting that it was all it cost. This same gentleman also trained Professor Wm. D. Whitney, of Yale College, the distinguished Sanscrit scholar; the late Rev. Dr. Woods, of Andover, and others who afterwards rose to eminence. On his grandson, Wm. H. Hallock, of *The Christian at Work*, devolved the enjoined duty of burning his grandfather's MS. sermons, which filled three barrels; and also of destroying the debris of Dr. Peter Bryant's drugs, which he accomplished in the garden behind the parsonage.

In a letter to the Rev. H. Seymour, of Northampton, Mass., Bryant thus speaks of his early Greek studies:—"I

began with the Greek alphabet, passed to the declensions and conjugations, which I committed to memory, and was put into the Gospel of St. John. In two calendar months from the time of beginning with the powers of the Greek alphabet I had read every book in the New Testament. I supposed, at the time, that I had made pretty good progress, but do not even now know whether that was very extraordinary."

"One of his surviving brothers," says General James Grant Wilson, "remembers that when the young poet came home on visits from his uncle Snell's, or 'Parson Hallock's,' he was in the habit of playing at games with them, and of amusing them in various ways; that he excelled as a runner, and later on had many successful contests with his college class-mates; also that he was accustomed on his home visits to declaim, for the entertainment of the family circle, some of his own compositions, both in prose and verse. He was, when studying with the pastor, a small, delicate, and handsome youth, very shy and reserved, and a great reader, devouring every volume that he could meet with, and resembling the hero of Waverley in 'driving through a sea of books like a vessel without pilot or rudder.' He was, I am also told by one who studied with him at that time,—now nearly seventy years ago,—a natural scholar like his father, and, although but fifteen, he had already accumulated a vast stock of information."

In October, 1810, in his sixteenth year, he joined the Sophomore Class at Williams College, and remained there for two sessions, diligently availing himself of the facilities for learning afforded by that excellent, noble, and pre-eminently Christian institution, so beautifully situated among the Berkshire hills.

Dr. Peter Bryant's pecuniary affairs were, at this time,

in a state which rendered retrenchment necessary, and so, in May, 1811, Bryant, in accordance with his father's instructions, took an honourable dismission, having only attended the classes for two terms, or seven months in all. The shy, sensitive, retiring student disliked and shrunk from the publicity of class duties, and was, therefore, nothing loath to return home to escape from an enforced routine, and to be left for a time to pursue in peace the arduous courses of solitary study which he had chalked out for himself. He has, however, left it on record, that President Fitch, of Williams College, was always kind to him.

It was the father's intention and hope that his son's college studies should, at a more convenient season, be resumed, if not at Williams, at Yale; but, as it turned out, his boy's class-days then ended.

Of the young student, many interesting particulars have been recorded.

The late Reverend Dr. Calvin Durfee, the historian of Williams College, stated that "Bryant did not graduate in a regular course with his class; still, long ago, by vote of the trustees of the college he was restored to his place in the class, and has been enrolled among the *alumni*." He adds that "Bryant was always scholarly and gentlemanly, with no eccentricities, no shooting forth of intellectual powers in one direction, to the neglect of other important qualifications or attainments."

The Rev. E. D. Barrett, one of his class-fellows, says that the circle of students all seemed to enjoy the arrival of the young stranger and poet, news of his precocious intellect having preceded him.

And Judge Sedgwick, then near the close of his eighty-third year, dating from Sharon, on July 3rd, writes thus of his old class-fellow:—

"His room-mate was John Avery, of Conway, Mass., who was some eight years his senior in age. Bryant had not then attained to the physical dimensions which he afterwards reached, but his bodily structure was remarkably regular and systematic. He had a prolific growth of dark brown hair, and I do not remember ever to have known a person in whom the progress of years made so great a difference in personal appearance as it did in the case of Mr. Bryant. I met him twice, near the close of his life, at Williams College Commencements, and, if I had not seen pictures of him as he appeared in old age, I would hardly have been persuaded of his identity with the Bryant I knew in early life.

"When he entered college it was known that he was the reputed author of two or three short poems which had recently been published, and which indicated decidedly promising talent on the part of their author. When spoken to in relation to these poetical effusions, he was reticent and modest, and, in fact, his modesty in everything was a peculiar trait of his character. It was very difficult to obtain from him any specimens of his talent as a poet. One exercise demanded of the students was the occasional writing of a composition to be read to the tutor in presence of the class, and once Bryant, in fulfilling this requirement, read a short poem which received the decided approval of the tutor, and once he translated one of the Odes of Horace, which he showed to a few personal friends. Those were the only examples of his poetry that I now remember of his furnishing during his college life. It may be stated here that the tutor who instructed Mr. Bryant in college was the Rev. Orange Lyman, who was afterwards the Presbyterian clergyman at Vernon, Oneida County, N.Y. . . .

"Bryant, during all his college experience, was remarkably quiet, pleasant, and unobtrusive in his manners, and studious in the literary course. His lessons were all well mastered, and not a single event occurred during his residence which received the least disapproval of the faculty."

He was noted for his fondness of the classics, and his love for the best literature; nor, although outwardly shy

and reserved, was he in the least morose, but, on the contrary, he had a keen appreciation of the humorous. On one occasion, which he himself mentions, when he had committed to memory a portion of Irving's *Salmagundi*, then just published, for repeating as a declamation before the class, he was so overcome with laughter when he appeared on the floor that he was unable to proceed!

His name has always been held in high honour at Williamstown. In 1819, the college conferred upon him the degree of A.M., and some years later, as we have mentioned, enrolled him as an alumnus.

Williamstown is one of the loveliest of the beautiful villages of New England, and its college has always been pre-eminently noted for its judicious and praiseworthy endeavours to promote the physical, intellectual, moral, and religious culture and well-being of its students, many of whom, occupying distinguished positions in art, science, literature, law, or in other responsible walks of life, have reflected high and merited honour on their Alma Mater. It was in the Mission Park at Williamstown, on a green slope surrounded by maple and fir trees, where now stands a white marble monument to indicate the sacred spot and commemorate the fact, that, in 1806, only four years before Bryant joined the college, five of the students, young men—Samuel J. Mills, James Richards, Harvey Loomis, Francis Le Barron Robbins, and Byram Green—at a prayer-meeting held in the open air, in the lee of a haystack, where they had temporarily sought shelter from a thunder shower, began the movement which, in that very year (1810), originated the American Board of Foreign Missions, of which the venerable and gifted the Rev. Dr. Mark Hopkins, ex-president of the college, is now the good, wise, and efficient President, a posi-

tion which he has held for the last three-and-twenty years.[1]

The present President of the College, the learned, active, and indefatigable Dr. P. A. Chadbourne—together with his accomplished wife, who is secretary of the Berkshire Branch of the *Woman's Board of Missions*—is also true as steel to the good and time-honoured traditions of the place.

The writer, a few years ago, when residing for ten months at Williamstown, near his friend, President Chadbourne, heard much in the locality about Bryant, from him, Dr. Hopkins, Professor Raymond, Dr. Samuel Duncan, the late Dr. Calvin Durfee, and other residents of that "happy valley;" and became quite familiar with those lovely scenes, where the young poet, in his student days, used to ramble, and to which he, then old and venerable, still occasionally returned.

The surrounding mountain scenery is enchantingly beautiful. The vale of the Hoosac itself resembles a great, broad, deep, fertile, Alpine valley. In shape it is irregularly circular, from eight to ten miles across the cup from rim to rim, and with other winding valleys opening into it on four sides. Two rivers—the Green and the Hoosac—flow through it; and in the centre of the great valley rise several gently undulating elevations of land. One, the most prominent of these, is shaped like an inverted saucer, and richly wooded, like the surrounding green heights. On this romantic elevation, gleaming white among the trees, stand the various college buildings, commanding magnificent views of the deep ravines immediately below, of the surrounding mountains

[1] For an article, by the present writer, giving an account of The Mission Park at Williamstown—"The Birthplace of American Foreign Missions," see *The Sunday at Home*, Oct., 1875.—A. J. S.

beyond them, and of the far blue hills seen rising in vistas on vistas through the distant valleys. The scenery is beautiful and richly varied on every side—whether the contrasts of light and shade be seen at noon, in the slanting glow of the morning or evening sun, or after sunset, when a pale, silvery, subdued light gleams up, ethereally pure, from the north-western horizon, and, blending softly and imperceptibly, at length fades away into the blue of the zenith; or when beheld "beautiful exceedingly" under the glorious and magical effects of moonlight in "the leafy month of June." There are, in truth, few lovelier spots in the world than the Hoosac valley.

To a visitor from Europe it seems scarcely credible that, not more than about one hundred and fifty years ago, these hills and valleys were covered with dense primeval forests; that here a few red men lived in wigwams, and wandered by the river's brink, and that hostile Indian tribes from Canada made savage incursions on these and on the early settlers.

Now the vale is a scene of peace, and a centre of civilization; Williams College, as a seat of learning, science, and religion, having already made itself powerfully felt for good, in many places scattered over the whole habitable globe.

Such were the outward aspects and surroundings of Williamstown, where the youthful Bryant dearly loved, in solitude, to wander and muse, seeing visions and dreaming dreams as to a possible future, which his great capacity for work, together with an unswerving devotion to truth and duty, afterwards enabled him to realize.

Till near the close of his long life he continued, from time to time, to revisit these scenes of natural beauty, so charming to strangers, but to him dearer still, because

suggestive of many early associations; and whenever he was able to renew acquaintance with them, it was always with fresh delight.

CHAPTER IV.

1811–1820: Thanatopsis—Plainfield and Great Barrington.

Home Studies—Thanatopsis written—Law Studies—Admires Wordsworth—Odes—Admitted to the Bar—Plainfield—Great Barrington—Thanatopsis published—Recollections of and Criticisms on Thanatopsis by Dana, Bryant, Miller, Palmer, Stoddard, and Curtis—The Poem itself—Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood—Bryant's Life at Great Barrington—Soothing Influences of Nature—Green River—To a Waterfowl—Prose Articles—Miss Sedgwick—Miss Frances Fairchild—Song, Oh Fairest of the Rural Maids.

At home, Bryant, for a year, devoted himself to the classics and mathematics, in the hope of accompanying his former class-mate to Yale College; but his father, still finding that the cost would be too great, could not afford to send him; so, with the Williamstown days, Bryant's schooling ended.

The muses, however, were not neglected; and in the *Hampshire Gazette* appeared an ode, a patriotic effusion, beginning—

> "The Birthday of our nation
> Once more we greet with smiles,"

which the editor introduced to his readers, identifying the authorship by telling them that it was "from the pen of Mr. William C. Bryant, son of Dr. Bryant of Cummington." Bryant was now thinking out and planning "Thanatopsis," a remarkable meditative poem on death, the first rough draught of which he wrote out in a week or so. This, the first enduring poem in American literature,

displays an originality, power, and stately solemn grandeur of which none of his previous efforts, clever though they be, had given the slightest presage. The youthful genius was now a master.

Local tradition erroneously represents him as having composed "Thanatopsis" in his student days, while seated on a rock in a ravine situated on the outskirts of Williamstown, which rock is still pointed out to curious visitors. He may, probably, have thought of it there, and of many other things besides, as he wandered and mused, "nourishing a youth sublime;" but we have the definite authority of his own words for saying, that "Thanatopsis" was written in his eighteenth or nineteenth year, he was not certain which; it was probably the former, but, in any case, after he left college, and before he began his law studies in 1813.

For some reason he did not send it, as he had sent other verses, to the *Hampshire Gazette;* nor did he seek, for it, publication in any form; but, laying it aside with the intention of retouching it, he would seem to have forgotten all about it.

Bryant now betook himself to the study of law under the guidance of Judge Samuel Howe of Worthington, near Cummington, with whom he resided for nearly two years.

On one occasion, we are told, the judge, finding a volume of Wordsworth in his student's hands, seriously warned him that such reading would spoil his style! His admiration for Wordsworth was great, and on reading that poet's writings for the first time he must have felt as Keats did on first looking into Chapman's Homer, —a new planet had swum into his ken, and he had encountered one of the memorable delights of his life. He once told Richard H. Dana, that, "Upon opening

Wordsworth, a thousand springs seemed to gush up at once in his heart, and the face of nature, of a sudden, to change into a strange freshness and life."

In the *Hampshire Gazette* appeared an ode, beginning,—

> "Amid the storms that shake the land,
> The din of party fray,"

written sometime after the first draft of "Thanatopsis," which had been laid aside in his portfolio for revisal and correction.

Bryant completed his legal studies, at Bridgewater, with the Hon. William Baylies, and, in 1815, at the age of twenty-one, was admitted to the bar at Plymouth.

He opened an office at Plainfield, where he had previously studied when being prepared for college, but there being little scope for practice and few clients there, in 1816, in the month of October, when the woods were in all the glory of autumn, he turned his back upon the Hampshire hills for the adjoining county of Berkshire, and settled in Great Barrington. There he was to pass the next nine years of his life; and there some of his well-known poems were to be written.

One day, Dr. Peter Bryant, then a member of the legislature, in turning over the contents of a drawer at Cummington, came upon several MS. poems which his son William had left behind him; and, among these was "Thanatopsis," with which he was greatly struck. It is related, that when the father showed it in manuscript, before its publication, to a lady well qualified to judge of its merits, simply saying, "Here are some lines that our Willie has been writing," she read the poem, raised her eyes to the father's face, and burst into tears, in which Dr. Bryant, a somewhat reserved and silent man, was not ashamed to join. "And no wonder," continues the

writer; "it must have seemed a mystery that in the bosom of eighteen had grown up thoughts that even in boyhood shaped themselves into solemn harmonies, majestic as the diapason of ocean, fit for a temple-service beneath the vault of heaven."

Quite unknown to his son, Dr. Bryant sent it, and two other of the poems, to the *North American Review.* Richard H. Dana, who was then on the committee of its management, was also greatly struck by the poems, but quite mystified as to their authorship at the time; and latterly, too, his memory was entirely at fault in supposing that the son had any hand whatever, either in sending the MSS. for publication, or in leading him to form any misconception on the subject. The following is the late venerable Dana's interesting account—subject to the correction we have pointed out—of what he remembers of the first publication of "Thanatopsis":—

"Going into town one day while assisting E. T. Channing (now Professor) in the *North American Review* (1817), he read to me a couple of pieces of poetry which had just been sent to the *Review*—the 'Thanatopsis' and 'The Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood.' While C—— was reading one of them I broke out saying, 'That was never written on this side of the water,' and naturally enough considering what American poetry had been up to that moment. I remember saying also, 'The father is much the cleverer man of the two.' Bryant's father was afterwards in our senate, and I went there to take a look at him. He was anything but a 'plain business-like aspect.' On the contrary, he had a finely marked and highly intellectual-looking head—you would have noticed him among a hundred men. But with all my examination I could not discover 'Thanatopsis' in it—the poetic phase was wanting to me. I remember going away with a feeling of mortification that I could not discover the poetic in the face of the writer of 'Thanatopsis.' There was no 'mistake of names,' you see, as

Griswold states. When for the first time I afterwards saw Bryant at Cambridge, and spoke to him about his father's 'Thanatopsis,' he explained the matter, and gave me a very characteristic reason for not sending both pieces in his own name; he felt as if it would be overdoing. We had a hearty laugh together when I told him of the physiognomical perplexity his fanciful deception had thrown me in."

The Rev. Jahu De Witt Miller states that Bryant wrote him from Cummington on August 9th, 1877, that —"'Thanatopsis' was originally a fragment beginning at the hemistich 'Yet a few days and thee,' and closing with the hemistich 'and make their bed with thee.' His father found it among papers he had left in Cummington, and took it to Boston.

"The author himself had nothing to do with its appearance in the *North American*, as *The Post* article intimates. It was published in the *North American* in September, 1817, not 1816, as is frequently stated.

"In the place of the present familiar introduction, there were the following four-line stanzas:—

"'Not that from life and all its woes
The hand of death shall set me free;
Not that this head shall then repose
In the low vale most peacefully.

"'Ah, when I touch Time's farthest brink,
A kinder solace must attend;
It chills my very soul to think
On the dread hour when life must end.

'In vain the flattering verse may breathe
Of ease from pain, and rest from strife;
There is a sacred dread of death
Inwoven with the strings of life.

"'This bitter cup at first was given
When angry justice frowned severe;

And 'tis the eternal doom of Heaven
That man must view the grave with fear.'

"These were written as a separate poem; but they were handed by Mr. Bryant's father to Mr. Edward T. Channing, Mr. Dana's colleague in the management of the *North American*, with the manuscript of 'Thanatopsis,' and" (the subject being similar, although the treatment is inferior and on a quite different key) "the same appeared in unbroken sequence upon them. Their separation, in the first edition of Mr. Bryant's poetical works, was simply the correction of an inadvertence.

"The body of 'Thanatopsis' stands as it did when first written. The introductory and closing lines were added in 1821, and some change made in the passage which speaks of the 'ocean.'

"Mr. Bryant said to me a year ago: 'The poem attracted as much attention when first published as anything I ever wrote, and the elder Dana, when he saw it, insisted that it could not have been written on this side of the Atlantic.' With 'Thanatopsis' appeared the inscription for the entrance to a wood, under the title of 'A Fragment.'"

The editors of the *North American Review*, cordially welcoming the advent of a true poet, were glad to publish what thus reached them.

Of "Thanatopsis," Christopher North, at a later period, said, "It alone is sufficient to establish the author's claim to the honours of genius;" and Christopher was right,—for it has taken and retained its place in the language.

Of Bryant and "Thanatopsis," Dr. Ray Palmer has ably and with fine discrimination pointed out, how remarkable it was that a youth of seventeen should have chosen such a theme, and that, in it should be found the

germs of thought which were more fully developed in his later poems. In short, it afforded the key-note to his subsequent harmonies. "It indicated also," says he, "that nearly faultless taste in the choice of language, and that ear for the nobler harmonies of verse, which lend such purity and dignity and sweetness to all Mr. Bryant's poetry. As if instinctively, he has habitually used good Saxon English in giving form to his poetical conceptions. He has selected words that clearly and precisely expressed his meaning, as every clear thinker may, whether in poetry or prose. There can hardly be a greater error, than that of those who fancy that obscurity is either poetical or profound. It betrays either a poor affectation, or a weak brain that produces half-formed thoughts. Not only do Mr. Bryant's words express his meaning clearly; they express it generally with such felicity, with such discrimination of the nicest shades of thought, and with a fitness so chastely elegant, that meaning and expression seem to have been born together, and to be parts of the same unity. His blank-verse, in sustained strength, flexibility, and sonorous sweetness, rivals the best passages of Wordsworth, and is surpassed by that of no other English poet, unless it be Milton himself. His pieces in rhyme exhibit great simplicity, as well as great variety in their measures, and a perfection of rhythmic movement that pleases even a fastidious ear. From the 'Thanatopsis' to his latest pieces, he exhibits a high degree of constructive skill. It would be difficult to find anywhere in his pages an unpoetic word or an inharmonious line."

Richard Henry Stoddard, after referring, in the first instance, to Wordsworth's influence on Bryant, thus writes of "Thanatopsis:"—

"No boy, no young man, has ever yet understood his

(Wordsworth's) serene and lofty genius. He touches, he moves no man, until years have brought the philosophic mind. It comes to some early, to some late, to some not at all. It came to Bryant early, and it never left him. 'Thanatopsis' struck the key-note of his genius, disclosed to him the growth and grandeur of his powers, and placed him, for what he was, before all American poets, past, present, and to come. . . .

"If we did not know that 'Thanatopsis' was the work of a young man, we would never guess that such was the fact, it is so serious, so elevated, so noble."

Of this poem, too, George William Curtis says:—

"I linger upon it, because it was the first adequate poetic voice of the solemn New England spirit; and in the grandeur of the hills, in the heroic Puritan tradition of sacrifice and endurance, in the daily life, saddened by imperious and awful theologic dogma, in the hard circumstance of the pioneer household, the contest with the wilderness, the grim legends of Indians and the war, have we not some outward clue to the strain of 'Thanatopsis,' the depthless and entrancing sadness, as of inexorable fate, that murmurs, like the autumn wind through the forest, in the melancholy cadences of this hymn to Death? Moreover, it was without a harbinger in our literature, and without a trace of the English masters of the hour."

We now present this remarkable poem in its complete and latest form:—

THANATOPSIS.

To him who in the love of Nature holds
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks
A various language; for his gayer hours
She has a voice of gladness, and a smile
And eloquence of beauty, and she glides
Into his darker musings, with a mild
And healing sympathy, that steals away
Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When thoughts

Of the last bitter hour come like a blight
Over thy spirit, and sad images
Of the stern agony, and shroud, and pall,
And breathless darkness, and the narrow house,
Make thee to shudder, and grow sick at heart;—
Go forth, under the open sky, and list
To Nature's teachings, while from all around—
Earth and her waters, and the depths of air—
Comes a still voice—Yet a few days, and thee
The all-beholding sun shall see no more
In all his course; nor yet in the cold ground,
Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears,
Nor in the embrace of ocean, shall exist
Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim
Thy growth, to be resolved to earth again,
And, lost each human trace, surrendering up
Thine individual being, shalt thou go
To mix for ever with the elements,
To be a brother to the insensible rock
And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain
Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak
Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould.

Yet not to thine eternal resting-place
Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish
Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down
With patriarchs of the infant world—with kings,
The powerful of the earth—the wise, the good,
Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,
All in one mighty sepulchre. The hills
Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun,—the vales
Stretching in pensive quietness between;
The venerable woods—rivers that move
In majesty, and the complaining brooks
That make the meadows green; and, poured round all,
Old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste,—
Are but the solemn decorations all
Of the great tomb of man. The golden sun,
The planets, all the infinite host of heaven,

Are shining on the sad abodes of death,
Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread
The globe are but a handful to the tribes
That slumber in its bosom.—Take the wings
Of morning, pierce the Barcan wilderness,
Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound,
Save his own dashings—yet the dead are there:
And millions in those solitudes, since first
The flight of years began, have laid them down
In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone.
So shalt thou rest, and what if thou withdraw
In silence from the living, and no friend
Take note of thy departure? All that breathe
Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh
When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care
Plod on, and each one as before will chase
His favourite phantom; yet all these shall leave
Their mirth and their employments, and shall come
And make their bed with thee. As the long train
Of ages glide away, the sons of men,
The youth in life's green spring, and he who goes
In the full strength of years, matron and maid,
The speechless babe, and the gray-headed man—
Shall one by one be gathered to thy side,
By those, who in their turn shall follow them.

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave, at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

Beyond a meadow, to the south of the old homestead at Cummington, lies the entrance to the wood, for which

the poet, in 1813, wrote the "Inscription" which was sent, along with 'Thanatopsis,' to the *Review*. This poem we also quote in full:—

INSCRIPTION FOR THE ENTRANCE TO A WOOD.

Stranger, if thou hast learned a truth which needs
No school of long experience, that the world
Is full of guilt and misery, and hast seen
Enough of all its sorrows, crimes, and cares,
To tire thee of it, enter this wild wood
And view the haunts of Nature. The calm shade
Shall bring a kindred calm, and the sweet breeze
That makes the green leaves dance, shall waft a balm
To thy sick heart. Thou wilt find nothing here
Of all that pained thee in the haunts of men,
And made thee loathe thy life. The primal curse
Fell, it is true, upon the unsinning earth,
But not in vengeance. God hath yoked to guilt
Her pale tormentor, misery. Hence, these shades
Are still the abodes of gladness; the thick roof
Of green and stirring branches is alive
And musical with birds, that sing and sport
In wantonness of spirit; while below
The squirrel, with raised paws and form erect,
Chirps merrily. Throngs of insects in the shade
Try their thin wings, and dance in the warm beam
That waked them into life. Even the green trees
Partake the deep contentment; as they bend
To the soft winds, the sun from the blue sky
Looks in and sheds a blessing on the scene.
Scarce less the cleft-born wild-flower seems to enjoy
Existence, than the wingèd plunderer
That sucks its sweets. The mossy rocks themselves,
And the old and ponderous trunks of prostrate trees
That lead from knoll to knoll a causey rude
Or bridge the sunken brook, and their dark roots,
With all their earth upon them, twisting high,

Breathe fixed tranquillity. The rivulet
Sends forth glad sounds, and tripping o'er its bed
Of pebbly sands, or leaping down the rocks,
Seems, with continuous laughter, to rejoice
In its own being. Softly tread the marge,
Lest from her midway perch thou scare the wren
That dips her bill in water. The cool wind,
That stirs the stream in play, shall come to thee,
Like one that loves thee, nor will let thee pass
Ungreeted, and shall give its light embrace.

The picturesque village of Great Barrington, where Bryant had now settled down, is situated among the Berkshire hills, in the beautiful valley of the Housatonic. There he delighted in long rambles, as in boyish days when he accompanied his father, and would return laden with sylvan trophies and botanical specimens. He read the best general literature, but did not allow such pursuits to interfere with professional engagements. He got into a fair practice and was reckoned a good lawyer.

A companion of those days, the venerable Ralph Taylor, who lived in the same house with him, remembers that he was fond of roaming over the hills, and in his walks was very genial and sociable. He had gay comrades, too, village revellers; but Bryant, then as always, quietly held his own temperate way, unseduced by fatal good-fellowship. "He was an active, learned, and, as I have heard, even a fiery young lawyer, and his name appears four or five times in the reports of the Supreme Court. He was also a true son of the land of the town-meeting, and he did not evade his duty as a citizen. On the first day of January, 1818, he delivered an address before the Great Barrington Bible Society, and, in 1820, he was elected clerk of the town, and remained in office until he removed to New York."

One of the first duties the young justice was called upon to perform, was a marriage ceremony under somewhat peculiar circumstances. The bridegroom, Major Robbins, and the bride, Miss Tobey, were both members of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and, there being no clergyman of their own denomination within reach, they preferred a purely civil ceremony to the intervention of a dissenter,—so Bryant was requested to tie the conjugal knot.

When weary with professional toils and the strifes of men, he had recourse to nature, and delighted more especially to visit the scenes of his childhood. Exerting a healing, recuperative influence, the old scenes always soothed him; and mark how he rejoices over them in his "Lines on Revisiting the Country"—

"I stand upon my native hills again,
Broad, round, and green, that in the summer sky
With garniture of waving grass and grain,
Orchards, and beechen forests, basking lie,
While deep the sunless glens are scooped between,
Where brawl o'er shallow beds the streams unseen.

. . . . . .

"Here, have I 'scaped the city's stifling heat,
Its horrid sounds, and its polluted air,
And, where the season's milder fervours beat,
And gales, that sweep the forest borders, bear
The song of bird and sound of running stream,
Am come awhile to wander and to dream."

At Great Barrington, in 1817, he wrote "The Green River," which, characterized by minute picturesqueness of detail, bears witness to his intimate communion with Nature. It is also markedly autobiographical, and expresses keen regret at his enforced absences from hill and dale, and, at the same time, dissatisfaction with law, which he

had now adopted as his profession. The last stanzas of the poem, contrasting his present enforced drudgery for the dregs of men, with the quiet calm in Nature's placid face which in old days won his heart, remind us of a similar thought in Heber's missionary hymn when he says—

"Every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile."

Let the reader now endeavour to realize and enjoy what Bryant here so beautifully describes:—

GREEN RIVER.

When breezes are soft and skies are fair,
I steal an hour from study and care,
And hie me away to the woodland scene,
Where wanders the stream with waters of green,
As if the bright fringe of herbs on its brink
Had given their stain to the wave they drink;
And they, whose meadows it murmurs through,
Have named the stream from its own fair hue.

Yet pure its waters—its shallows are bright
With coloured pebbles and sparkles of light,
And clear the depths where its eddies play,
And dimples deepen and whirl away,
And the plane-tree's speckled arms o'ershoot
The swifter current that mines its root,
Through whose shifting leaves, as you walk the hill,
The quivering glimmer of sun and rill
With a sudden flash on the eye is thrown,
Like the ray that streams from the diamond-stone.
Oh, loveliest there the spring days come,
With blossoms, and birds, and wild-bees' hum;
The flowers of summer are fairest there,
And freshest the breath of the summer air;
And sweetest the golden autumn day
In silence and sunshine glides away.

Yet fair as thou art, thou shunnest to glide,
Beautiful stream! by the village side;
But windest away from haunts of men,
To quiet valley and shaded glen;
And forest, and meadow, and slope of hill,
Around thee, are lonely, lovely, and still,
Lonely—save when, by thy rippling tides,
From thicket to thicket the angler glides;
Or the simpler comes, with basket and book,
For herbs of power on thy banks to look;
Or haply, some idle dreamer, like me,
To wander, and muse, and gaze on thee,
Still—save the chirp of birds that feed
On the river cherry and seedy reed,
And thy own wild music gushing out
With mellow murmur of fairy shout,
From dawn to the blush of another day,
Like traveller singing along his way.

That fairy music I never hear,
Nor gaze on those waters so green and clear,
And mark them winding away from sight,
Darkened with shade or flashing with light,
While o'er them the vine to its thicket clings,
And the zephyr stoops to freshen his wings,
But I wish that fate had left me free
To wander these quiet haunts with thee,
Till the eating cares of earth should depart,
And the peace of the scene pass into my heart;
And I envy thy stream, as it glides along
Through its beautiful banks in a trance of song.

Though forced to drudge for the dregs of men,
And scrawl strange words with the barbarous pen,
And mingle among the jostling crowd,
Where the sons of strife are subtle and loud—
I often come to this quiet place,
To breathe the airs that ruffle thy face,
And gaze upon thee in silent dream,

For in thy lonely and lovely stream
An image of that calm life appears
That won my heart in my greener years.

Although neglecting no duties, it is plain that "Bryant's taste, his temperament, and his natural powers, were averse to law. The literary instinct was always stirring in his heart, and there are constant and delightful traces of his literary industry at this time. In March, 1818, he published in the *North American Review* a fragment of 'Simonides,' the 'Lines to a Water-fowl,' and a poem to a friend upon his marriage, in which the poet gaily declares what he daily disproved:—

'And I that loved to trace the woods before,
And climb the hill, a playmate to the breeze,
Have vowed to tune the rural lay no more,
Have bid my useless classics sleep at ease,
And left the race of bards to scribble, starve, and freeze.'

"If he thought himself willing to leave the muse, she was not ready to desert him."

His declared intention reminds us of young Isaac Watts, whose father had forbidden him to rhyme, and who, when about to receive a chastisement for transgressing in that way, pitifully exclaimed—

"Oh! father, do some pity take,
And I no more will verses make!"

It was in 1815, during his residence at Cummington, in his twenty-first year, that his lines addressed "To a Water-fowl" were written. They were published six months after "Thanatopsis," and, next to it, are the best known of his earlier poems. "Like the other productions of its author," says Dr. H. N. Powers, "its concep-

tion was natural. One evening he saw a wild-duck flying across a sky of marvellous beauty, and a picture of the Divine Providence was revealed to him. Southey's poem 'The Ebb-Tide' suggested the form of the stanza; and his genius wrought the elevated and tranquillizing verses which were published in the *North American Review*."

This exquisite poem displays keen and accurate observation of Nature, sound philosophy, and fine lessons of faith and trust in God's all-embracing providence, expressed, throughout, in language clear and strong, and in melody simple and sweet.

We possess, and preserve amongst our choicest treasures, a manuscript copy of these beautiful lines, written out for us by the venerable poet not long before his death.

Before giving the poem itself, we preface it with the following passage from an able article by Dr. Ray Palmer in the *International Review*:—

"The piece entitled 'To a Waterfowl' exhibits a combination of some of Mr. Bryant's best characteristics. It has always been a favourite. It is an example of that refined and subtle imagination which is one of the highest gifts of any poet, and which is displayed to an eminent degree in many of Mr. Bryant's pieces. Nothing more exquisite can be conceived than the picture it presents to the mental eye of the imaginative reader. The melody of the verse is as sweet as it is simple. The choice of language is perfect. Made up very largely of monosyllabic words, the stanzas are clear and strong. Then, while the eye is following the solitary figure as it seems to 'float along,' till, fading to an atom, it vanishes in the far-off heaven, comes the suggested thought of God's all-embracing providence guiding it on its trackless way—a fine illustration of the faith which seems so inwrought into the heart of the writer that spontaneously it seeks expression on every fit occasion."

TO A WATERFOWL.

Whither, 'midst falling dew,
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way?

Vainly the fowler's eye
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
As, darkly seen against the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.

Seek'st thou the plashy brink
Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide,
Or where the rocking billows rise and sink
On the chafed ocean-side?

There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast—
The desert and illimitable air—
Lone wandering, but not lost.

All day thy wings have fanned,
At that far height, the cold, thin atmosphere,
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,
Though the dark night is near.

And soon that toil shall end;
Soon shalt thou find a summer home, and rest,
And scream among thy fellows; reeds shall bend,
Soon, o'er thy sheltered nest.

Thou'rt gone, the abyss of heaven
Hath swallowed up thy form; yet, on my heart
Deeply hath sunk the lesson thou hast given
And shall not soon depart.

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

Bryant also contributed several prose articles to the pages of the *North American Review;* the July number of that same year (1818) contained "an interesting paper upon American poetry, in which he finds little to praise, but thinks that it was better than could have been expected in a young nation just beginning to attend to intellectual refinement, and he concludes felicitously, but discouragingly, that the only poets we had could hardly be more admired 'without danger to the taste of the nation.' A year later, in June, 1819, he published a short essay in the *North American Review*, on 'The Happy Temperament,' which is singularly interesting as the work of a poet whose strain is sometimes called remote from human sympathy, and a man who was so often thought to be cold and austere. It is not, says the author of 'Thanatopsis,' the shallow, unsympathetic disposition which laughs all ills away that is to be called happy, because the 'melancholy feelings, when called up by their proper and natural causes, and confined to their proper limits, are the parents of almost all our virtues.' 'The temperament of an unbroken cheerfulness,' says our poet, 'is the temperament of insensibility.' A paper in the September number of the same year, on 'Tri-syllabic Feet, in Iambic Verse,' shows his constant and careful study of the literary art, as well as of literature."

At Great Barrington Bryant made the acquaintance of Miss Catherine M. Sedgwick, an authoress now well known for the refinement and home sentiment of her sketches and stories. She afterwards dedicated to him her novel *Redwood.* From her pen we have a sketch of the poet at this period. Writing from Stockbridge on May 17th, 1820, she says:—

"I sent for Mr. Bryant last week, and he called to see me on his return from court. I told him Mr. Sewall had com-

missioned me to request some contributions from him to a collection of hymns; and he said, without any hesitation, that he was obliged to Mr. Sewall, and would with great pleasure comply with his request. He has a charming countenance, and modest but not bashful manners. I made him promise to come and see us shortly. He seemed gratified; and if Mr. Sewall has reason to be obliged to me (which I certainly think he has), I am doubly obliged by an opportunity of securing the acquaintance of so interesting a man."

At Great Barrington Bryant also met—and loved—Miss Frances Fairchild, a lady of good family. His love for her was pure and lasting, and she was in every way well worthy of it. The song, in which a hunter, lingering beside the hill, sees the dwelling of his Genevieve, is a veiled commemoration of the shy poet's own love:—

SONG.

Soon as the glazed and gleaming snow
Reflects the day-dawn cold and clear,
The hunter of the West must go
In depth of woods to seek the deer.

His rifle on his shoulder placed,
His stores of death arranged with skill,
His moccasins and snow-shoes laced—
Why lingers he beside the hill?

Far, in the dim and doubtful light,
Where woody slopes a valley leave,
He sees what none but lover might,
The dwelling of his Genevieve.

And oft he turns his truant eye,
And pauses oft, and lingers near;
But when he marks the reddening sky,
He bounds away to hunt the deer.

The following verses, which, for simple purity and delicate imagery, are most characteristic of Bryant's genius, were also addressed to the lady of his choice:—

"OH FAIREST OF THE RURAL MAIDS."

Oh fairest of the rural maids!
Thy birth was in the forest shades;
Green boughs, and glimpses of the sky,
Were all that met thine infant eye.

Thy sports, thy wanderings, when a child,
Were ever in the sylvan wild;
And all the beauty of the place
Is in thy heart and on thy face.

The twilight of the trees and rocks
Is in the light shade of thy locks;
Thy step is as the wind, that weaves
Its playful way among the leaves.

Thine eyes are springs, in whose serene
And silent waters heaven is seen;
Their lashes are the herbs that look
On their young figures in the brook.

The forest depths, by foot unpressed,
Are not more sinless than thy breast;
The holy peace, that fills the air
Of those calm solitudes, is there.

CHAPTER V.

1821-1825: Great Barrington—His Marriage—The Ages—Volume Published—Other Poems—Abandons Law.

Marriage and Happy Home Life—Recites The Ages at Harvard—Selections from that Poem—Publishes a Volume—The Yellow Violet—Walk at Sunset—The West Wind—The Massacre at Scio—The Indian Girl's Lament—An Indian at the Burial-place of his Fathers—Monument Mountain—After a Tempest—A Forest Hymn—The Old Man's Funeral—The Murdered Traveller—March—Autumn Woods—Hymn to the North Star—Lapse of Time—Verplanck and the Sedgwicks—Visits New York City—Leaves Great Barrington and the Law—His disgust at Legal Chicanery—June.

In January, 1821, at Great Barrington, Miss Frances Fairchild became Mr. Bryant's wife; and, for six-and-forty years thereafter, she was the good angel of his life. A woman of rare excellence, naturally sympathetic, gentle and prepossessing, she was kind, hospitable, greatly beloved, and universally respected by friends and acquaintances. Thoroughly ingenuous, she yet possessed great practical sagacity and tact, while "her whole life," we are told by Dr. Ray Palmer, "was pervaded by a tranquil religious spirit." Mr. Bryant's domestic life in all respects was an eminently happy one. During the whole period they lived together "his wife was his only really intimate friend, and when she died he had no other. He was young, his fame was growing, and with domestic duties, with literary studies and work, and professional and public activities, his tranquil days passed in the happy valley of the Housatonic." Always trustful and helpful, the memory of her purity, devotion, and piety is embalmed in many of the poet's stanzas, to some of which we shall afterwards have occasion to refer.

The great interest awakened by his published poems

now led the students of Harvard College, Cambridge, to ask Bryant to recite a poem before them during Commencement week. This was in the summer of 1821, the year of his marriage, and when he was in his twenty-seventh year.

In response, the young lawyer prepared "The Ages," a didactic poem, the longest and most elaborate he ever wrote. Thoughtful and suggestive, it stands first in all the complete editions of Bryant's collected works, forming a fitting introduction to the other poems. General James Grant Wilson aptly characterizes it as "A comprehensive poetical essay, reviewing the world's progress, in a panoramic view of the ages, and glowing with a prophetic vision of the future of America."

George William Curtis says, "It is a simple, serious, and thoughtful survey of history, tracing a general law of progress; and the stately Spenserian measure is marked by the moderation, the sinewy simplicity, the maturity and freedom from mannerism, which are Bryant's sign-manual. The last stanza of this poem breathes in majestic music that pure passion for America, and that strong and sublime faith in her destiny, which constantly appears in his verse and never wavered in his heart."

Richard Henry Stoddard describes it, as a rapid, comprehensive, philosophic, and picturesque summary of the history of mankind from the earliest periods, a shifting panorama of good and evil figures and deeds, the rising and falling of religions, kingdoms, empires, and the great shapes of Greece and Rome. "The twentieth stanza, which describes the lazy convent life of the Romish orders," says he, "is a masterpiece of quiet sarcasm; and the lines which convey profoundly the influences of the Romish Church are so matchless that I must quote them:—

'The throne, whose roots are in another world,
And whose far-reaching shadow awed our own.'

"The pictures of the landscapes of this western world, beautiful, grand, animated, many-watered and sail-thronged, the glimpses of Indian life, the appearance of the white race, the receding of forests and the rising of towns—all form a magnificent gallery of life and action and emotion. The young gentlemen of Harvard were wiser than they knew when they invited Bryant to write a poem for them; for their invitation resulted in the best college poem that ever was written."

The following stanzas of the poem precede his survey of the great empires of the old world:—

"Look on this beautiful world, and read the truth
In her fair page; see, every season brings
New change, to her, of everlasting youth;
Still the green soil, with joyous living things,
Swarms, the wide air is full of joyous wings,
And myriads, still, are happy in the sleep
Of ocean's azure gulfs, and where he flings
The restless surge. Eternal Love doth keep,
In his complacent arms, the earth, the air, the deep.

"Will then the merciful One, who stamped our race
With his own image, and who gave them sway
O'er earth, and the glad dwellers on her face,
Now that our swarming nations far away
Are spread, where'er the moist earth drinks the day,
Forget the ancient care that taught and nursed
His latest offspring? will he quench the ray
Infused by his own forming smile at first,
And leave a work so fair all blighted and accursed?

"Oh, no! a thousand cheerful omens give
Hope of yet happier days, whose dawn is nigh.
He who has tamed the elements, shall not live

The slave of his own passions; he whose eye
Unwinds the eternal dances of the sky,
And in the abyss of brightness dares to span
The sun's broad circle, rising yet more high,
In God's magnificent works his will shall scan—
And love and peace shall make their paradise with man."

How fresh and beautiful is his picture of the American continent!

Late, from this Western shore, that morning chased
The deep and ancient night, which threw its shroud
O'er the green land of groves, the beautiful waste,
Nurse of full streams, and lifter-up of proud
Sky-mingling mountains that o'erlook the cloud.
Erewhile, where yon gay spires their brightness rear,
Trees waved, and the brown hunter's shouts were loud
Amid the forest; and the bounding deer
Fled at the glancing plume, and the gaunt wolf yelled near.

And where his willing waves yon bright blue bay
Sends up, to kiss his decorated brim,
And cradles, in his soft embrace, the gay
Young group of grassy islands born of him,
And crowding nigh, or in the distance dim,
Lifts the white throng of sails, that bear or bring
The commerce of the world;—with tawny limb,
And belt and beads in sunlight glistening,
The savage urged his skiff like wild bird on the wing.

Then all this youthful paradise around,
And all the broad and boundless mainland, lay
Cooled by the interminable wood, that frowned
O'er mount and vale, where never summer ray
Glanced, till the strong tornado broke his way
Through the gray giants of the sylvan wild;
Yet many a sheltered glade, with blossoms gay
Beneath the showery sky and sunshine mild,
Within the shaggy arms of that dark forest smiled.

There stood the Indian hamlet, there the lake
Spread its blue sheet that flashed with many an oar,
Where the brown otter plunged him from the brake,
And the deer drank: as the light gale flew o'er,
The twinkling maize-field rustled on the shore;
And while that spot, so wild, and lone, and fair,
A look of glad and guiltless beauty wore,
And peace was on the earth and in the air,
The warrior lit the pile, and bound his captive there.

Not unavenged—the foeman, from the wood,
Beheld the deed, and when the midnight shade
Was stillest, gorged his battle-axe with blood;
All died—the wailing babe—the shrinking maid—
And in the flood of fire that scathed the glade,
The roofs went down; but deep the silence grew,
When on the dewy woods the day-beam played;
No more the cabin-smokes rose wreathed and blue,
And ever, by their lake, lay moored the bark canoe.

Look now abroad—another race has filled
These populous borders—wide the wood recedes,
And towns shoot up, and fertile realms are tilled:
The land is full of harvests and green meads;
Streams numberless, that many a fountain feeds,
Shine, disembowered, and give to sun and breeze
Their virgin waters; the full region leads
New colonies forth, that toward the western seas
Spread, like a rapid flame among the autumnal trees.

We also present the closing stanza of the poem—that to which Curtis refers:—

But thou, my country, thou shalt never fall,
Save with thy children—thy maternal care,
Thy lavish love, thy blessings showered on all—
These are thy fetters—seas and stormy air
Are the wide barrier of thy borders, where,
Among thy gallant sons who guard thee well,
Thou laugh'st at enemies: who shall then declare

The date of thy deep-founded strength, or tell
How happy, in thy lap, the sons of men shall dwell?

At this time he was earnestly and wisely advised by his friends, Richard H. Dana, Professor Edward T. Channing of Harvard College, and Judge Willard Philips, to publish "The Ages," with other poems, in a volume, which he accordingly did.

This little thin book of forty-four pages was issued by Hilliard & Metcalf, of Cambridge, Mass., and entitled *Poems by William Cullen Bryant.* Of it General James Grant Wilson writes:—

"A copy is now lying before me. It contains 'The Ages,' 'To a Waterfowl,' 'Translation of a Fragment of Simonides,' 'Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood,' 'The Yellow Violet,' 'Song,' 'Green River,' and 'Thanatopsis.' In this rare little volume, the first and last paragraphs of the latter poem appear as they now stand, the version originally published in the *North American Review* having commenced with the lines,

'Yet a few days, and thee
The all-beholding sun shall see no more
In all his course;'

and ended with the words,

'And make their bed with thee.'

"Last winter I met Mr. Bryant in a Broadway bookstore, and showed him a copy of this early edition of his poetical writings, which the dealer in literary wares had just sold for ten dollars. He laughingly remarked, 'Well, that's more than I received for its contents.'"

The volume was everywhere favourably received, and, beyond question, established Bryant's reputation as a poet. It contains the following simple and beautiful poem:—

THE YELLOW VIOLET.

When beechen buds begin to swell,
And woods the blue-bird's warble know,
The yellow violet's modest bell
Peeps from the last year's leaves below.

Ere russet fields their green resume,
Sweet flower, I love, in forest bare,
To meet thee, when thy faint perfume
Alone is in the virgin air.

Of all her train, the hands of Spring
First plant thee in the watery mould,
And I have seen thee blossoming
Beside the snow-bank's edges cold.

Thy parent sun, who bade thee view
Pale skies, and chilling moisture sip,
Has bathed thee in his own bright hue,
And streaked with jet thy glowing lip.

Yet slight thy form, and low thy seat,
And earthward bent thy gentle eye,
Unapt the passing view to meet,
When loftier flowers are flaunting nigh.

Oft, in the sunless April day,
Thy early smile has stayed my walk;
But midst the gorgeous blooms of May,
I passed thee on thy humble stalk.

So they, who climb to wealth, forget
The friends in darker fortunes tried.
I copied them—but I regret
That I should ape the ways of pride.

And when again the genial hour
Awakes the painted tribes of light,
I'll not o'erlook the modest flower
That made the woods of April bright.

Shortly afterwards appeared his "Hymn to Death," to which allusion has already been made, in connection with the touching tribute, near the close of it, to the memory of his father. In the poem, he looks upon death as the friend of man, delivering him from the hand of the tyrannical oppressor and wrong-doer, and from the ceaseless tormenting worry, and worse than fiendish cruelty of the wicked.

In this same memorable year, too (1821), Dana published his *Idle Man*, and amongst Bryant's contributions to it were "The Green River," the "Walk at Sunset," and "The West Wind."

"A Walk at Sunset," says Stoddard, "is an exquisitely tender picture of the Housatonic Valley as I have seen it on summer evenings, at Stockbridge, when it is suffused with yellow light, and the eastern heavens are coloured rosily. The peculiar beauty of the landscape recalls the memory of those who looked upon it in earlier days, and who are not unnaturally supposed to have felt its calmness, and to have been won by its charm. The poet sees them in fancy, and reviews for the moment their pleasing belief that the souls of their warriors went to happy islands beyond the sunset—

> 'Where winds are aye at peace, and skies are fair,
> And purple-skirted clouds curtain the crimson air.'

"The poet's thoughts wander back to days before the red man came, when the deer fed in the shade, and no tree in the wilderness was felled except by the tooth of the beaver, the winds, or the rush of floods. Visions of their coming, their deeds in the chase and in war pass before his eyes, and he sees the green sod of the valley and the silvery waters of the river taking the first stains of blood. They are gone now, gone like the sunset, and

night is pressing on. All that tells their story is the white bone which the plough strikes in the harvest field. The offspring of another race, he stands upon their ashes, beside a stream they loved; and where their night-fire showed the gray oaks by fits, and their war-song rang, he teaches the quiet shades the strains of a new tongue. He bids the sun farewell; his light will shine on other changes, but he will never see those realms again,

'Darkened by boundless groves and roamed by savage men.'

"I have dwelt upon this element of Bryant's poetry, because it appeared, in no other American poet, to the same extent and with the same force. His mind, always a tenacious one, never suffered it to escape, but referred to it in after years again and again."

In it, Bryant begins to link the surrounding scenes of nature with the aboriginal races who formerly gazed on them:—

For ages, on the silent forests here,
Thy beams did fall before the red man came
To dwell beneath them; in their shade, the deer
Fed, and feared not the arrow's deadly aim.
Nor tree was felled, in all that world of woods,
Save by the beaver's tooth, or winds, or rush of floods.

Then came the hunter tribes, and thou didst look,
For ages, on their deeds in the hard chase,
And well-fought wars; green sod and silver brook
Took the first stain of blood; before thy face
The warrior generations came and passed,
And glory was laid up for many an age to last.

Note the accurate observation and fine open-air feeling displayed in the following verses from "The West Wind:"—

Thou wind of joy, and youth, and love;
Spirit of the new-wakened year!
The sun in his blue realm above
Smooths a bright path when thou art here.

In lawns, the murmuring bee is heard,
The wooing ring-dove, in the shade;
On thy soft breath, the new-fledged bird
Takes wing, half happy, half afraid.

Ah! thou art like our wayward race;—
When not a shade of pain or ill
Dims the bright smile of Nature's face,
Thou lov'st to sigh and murmur still.

Bryant "was already acknowledged to be the first of American poets, and he himself dates the dawn of trans-Atlantic literature in the year 1821, which was the year of his marriage and of his own Harvard poem. It was in that year that Cooper's *Spy* was published and Irving's *Sketch-Book* was completed, and Bryant's own first slight volume was issued; Dana's *Idle Man* was just finished, and Miss Sedgwick had already published *Hope Leslie.* Two years before, Percival's first volume had appeared, which Edward Everett had saluted as a harbinger of great achievements; and Halleck's and Drake's *Croakers* were already popular. Bryant's ambition, his hopes, his conscious power, secretly solicited him and weaned him more and more from the law."

The war for the deliverance of Greece, which had begun during the previous year (1820), led to his writing that spirited lyric, "The Massacre at Scio," and the "Song of the Greek Amazon."

Of the first of these, Bryant himself writes:—"This poem, written about the time of the horrible butchery of the Sciotes by the Turks, in 1824, has been more fortunate than most poetical predictions. The independence

of the Greek nation, which it foretold, has come to pass, and the massacre, by inspiring a deeper detestation of their oppressors, did much to promote that event."

THE MASSACRE AT SCIO.

Weep not for Scio's children slain;
Their blood, by Turkish falchions shed,
Sends not its cry to Heaven in vain
For vengeance on the murderer's head.

Though high the warm red torrent ran
Between the flames that lit the sky,
Yet, for each drop, an arméd man
Shall rise, to free the land, or die.

And for each corpse, that in the sea
Was thrown, to feast the scaly herds,
A hundred of the foe shall be
A banquet for the mountain-birds.

Stern rites and sad shall Greece ordain
To keep that day along her shore,
Till the last link of slavery's chain
Is shattered, to be worn no more.

From the last—the "Song of the Greek Amazon"—we have only space for one verse; but it is so full of pathos and beauty, that it very suggestively pictures the tragedy of a whole life:—

"My mirror is the mountain-spring,
At which I dress my ruffled hair;
My dimmed and dusty arms I bring,
And wash away the blood-stain there.
Why should I guard from wind and sun
This cheek, whose virgin rose is fled?
It was for one—oh, only one—
I kept its bloom, and he is dead."

During the next four years, at intervals, amongst other

themes, he wrote his Indian poems, including "The Indian Girl's Lament," "An Indian Story," "An Indian at the Burial-place of his Fathers," and "Monument Mountain."

These were evidently suggested by local traditions. "The Indian Girl's Lament" is exquisitely tender and picturesque. The opening verse is peculiarly felicitous, and strikes the key-note for the whole that follows, which is conceived in the same spirit as that which breathes in "The Sunset Walk":—

"'An Indian girl was sitting where
Her lover, slain in battle, slept;
Her maiden veil, her own black hair,
Came down o'er eyes that wept;
And wildly, in her woodland tongue,
This sad and simple lay she sung.'"

"An Indian at the Burial-place of his Fathers" Stoddard considers the best of the aboriginal poems, and says:—"If it has a fault, I have yet to find it, for, *me judice*, it is as glorious as the Berkshire scenery which it celebrates. The dramatic situation and the character of the speaker are both seized and retained with distinctness and strength." How touchingly he exclaims:—

"They waste us—ay—like April snow
In the warm noon, we shrink away;
And fast they follow, as we go
Toward the setting day—
Till they shall fill the land, and we
Are driven into the Western Sea."

In the noble poem, "Monument Mountain," a tragic story, full of pathos, is gracefully told. Of its origin, Bryant himself tells us that—"The mountain called by

this name is a remarkable precipice in Great Barrington, overlooking the rich and picturesque valley of the Housatonic, in the western part of Massachusetts. At the southern extremity is, or was a few years since, a conical pile of small stones, erected, according to the tradition of the surrounding country, by the Indians, in memory of a woman of the Stockbridge tribe who killed herself by leaping from the edge of the precipice. Until within a few years past, small parties of that tribe used to arrive from their settlement in the western part of the State of New York, on visits to Stockbridge, the place of their nativity and former residence. A young woman belonging to one of these parties related, to a friend of the author, the story on which the poem of 'Monument Mountain' is founded. An Indian girl had formed an attachment for her cousin, which, according to the customs of the tribe, was unlawful. She was, in consequence, seized with a deep melancholy, and resolved to destroy herself. In company with a female friend, she repaired to the mountain, decked out for the occasion in all her ornaments, and, after passing the day on the summit in singing with her companion the traditional songs of her nation, she threw herself headlong from the rock, and was killed."

Of this poem Stoddard says:—"It is the most sustained and even of his early blank verse poems, grand in its sweep, picturesque in its groupings, dramatic, pathetic, primitive, a fitting monument for the poor Indian girl who perished among its precipices."

MONUMENT MOUNTAIN.

Thou who would'st see the lovely and the wild
Mingled in harmony on Nature's face,
Ascend our rocky mountains. Let thy foot

Fail not with weariness, for on their tops
The beauty and the majesty of earth,
Spread wide beneath, shall make thee to forget
The steep and toilsome way. There, as thou stand'st,
The haunts of men below thee, and around
The mountain-summits, thy expanding heart
Shall feel a kindred with that loftier world
To which thou art translated, and partake
The enlargement of thy vision. Thou shalt look
Upon the green and rolling forest-tops,
And down into the secrets of the glens,
And streams that with their bordering thickets strive
To hide their windings. Thou shalt gaze, at once,
Here on white villages, and tilth, and herds,
And swarming roads, and there on solitudes
That only hear the torrent, and the wind,
And eagle's shriek. There is a precipice
That seems a fragment of some mighty wall,
Built by the hand that fashioned the old world,
To separate its nations, and thrown down
When the flood drowned them. To the north, a path
Conducts you up the narrow battlement.
Steep is the western side, shaggy and wild
With mossy trees, and pinnacles of flint,
And many a hanging crag. But, to the east,
Sheer to the vale go down the bare old cliffs—
Huge pillars, that in middle heaven upbear
Their weather-beaten capitals, here dark
With moss, the growth of centuries, and there
Of chalky whiteness where the thunderbolt
Has splintered them. It is a fearful thing
To stand upon the beetling verge, and see
Where storm and lightning, from that huge gray wall,
Have tumbled down vast blocks, and at the base
Dashed them in fragments, and to lay thine ear
Over the dizzy depth, and hear the sound
Of winds, that struggle with the woods below,
Come up like ocean murmurs. But the scene

Is lovely round; a beautiful river there
Wanders amid the fresh and fertile meads,
The paradise he made unto himself,
Mining the soil for ages. On each side
The fields swell upward to the hills; beyond,
Above the hills, in the blue distance rise
The mountain-columns with which earth props heaven.

There is a tale about these reverend rocks,
A sad tradition of unhappy love,
And sorrows borne and ended, long ago,
When over these fair vales the savage sought
His game in the thick woods. There was a maid,
The fairest of the Indian maids, bright-eyed,
With wealth of raven tresses, a light form,
And a gay heart. About her cabin-door
The wide old woods resounded with her song
And fairy laughter all the summer day.
She loved her cousin; such a love was deemed,
By the morality of those stern tribes,
Incestuous, and she struggled hard and long
Against her love, and reasoned with her heart,
As simple Indian maiden might. In vain.
Then her eye lost its lustre, and her step
Its lightness, and the gray-haired men that passed
Her dwelling, wondered that they heard no more
The accustomed song and laugh of her, whose looks
Were like the cheerful smile of Spring, they said,
Upon the Winter of their age. She went
To weep where no eye saw, and was not found
When all the merry girls were met to dance,
And all the hunters of the tribe were out;
Nor when they gathered from the rustling husk
The shining ear; nor, when, by the river's side,
They pulled the grape and startled the wild shades
With sounds of mirth. The keen-eyed Indian dames
Would whisper to each other, as they saw
Her wasting form, and say, *The girl will die.*

One day into the bosom of a friend,
A playmate of her young and innocent years,
She poured her griefs. "Thou know'st, and thou alone,"
She said, "for I have told thee, all my love,
And guilt, and sorrow. I am sick of life.
All night I weep in darkness, and the morn
Glares on me, as upon a thing accursed,
That has no business on the earth. I hate
The pastimes and the pleasant toils that once
I loved; the cheerful voices of my friends
Sound in my ear like mockings, and, at night,
In dreams, my mother, from the land of souls,
Calls me and chides me. All that look on me
Do seem to know my shame; I cannot bear
Their eyes; I cannot from my heart root out
The love that wrings it so, and I must die."

It was a summer morning, and they went
To this old precipice. About the cliffs
Lay garlands, ears of maize, and shaggy skins
Of wolf and bear, the offerings of the tribe
Here made to the Great Spirit, for they deemed,
Like worshippers of the elder time, that God
Doth walk on the high places and affect
The earth-o'erlooking mountains. She had on
The ornaments with which her father loved
To deck the beauty of his bright-eyed girl,
And bade her wear when stranger warriors came
To be his guests. Here the friends sat them down,
And sang, all day, old songs of love and death,
And decked the poor wan victim's hair with flowers,
And prayed that safe and swift might be her way
To the calm world of sunshine, where no grief
Makes the heart heavy and the eyelids red.
Beautiful lay the region of her tribe
Below her—waters resting in the embrace
Of the wide forest, and maize-planted glades
Opening amid the leafy wilderness.

She gazed upon it long, and at the sight
Of her own village peeping through the trees,
And her own dwelling, and the cabin roof
Of him she loved with an unlawful love,
And came to die for, a warm gush of tears
Ran from her eyes. But when the sun grew low
And the hill shadows long, she threw herself
From the steep rock and perished. There was scooped,
Upon the mountain's southern slope, a grave;
And there they laid her, in the very garb
With which the maiden decked herself for death,
With the same withering wild-flowers in her hair.
And o'er the mould that covered her, the tribe
Built up a simple monument, a cone
Of small loose stones. Thenceforward all who passed,
Hunter, and dame, and virgin, laid a stone
In silence on the pile. It stands there yet.
And Indians from the distant West, who come
To visit where their fathers' bones are laid,
Yet tell the sorrowful tale, and to this day
The mountain where the hapless maiden died
Is called the Mountain of the Monument.

"From the stern and stately blank verse of 'Monument Mountain,' the genius of Bryant turned, in 'After a Tempest,' and painted an exquisite series of pictures of out-door life in six perfect Spenserian stanzas. Every line, every word is a picture, or a suggestion of a picture, and the manifold details are everywhere subordinate to the general effect.

"'The butterfly,
That seemed a living blossom of the air,'

is exceedingly beautiful." In this poem he says:—

"I looked, and thought the quiet of the scene
An emblem of the peace that yet shall be,
When o'er earth's continents, and isles between,

The noise of war shall cease from sea to sea,
And married nations dwell in harmony;
When millions, crouching in the dust to one,
No more shall beg their lives on bended knee,
Nor the black stake be dressed, nor in the sun
The o'erlaboured captive toil, and wish his life were done."

In 1824 Bryant engaged to furnish the publisher of the *United States Literary Gazette*, a Boston fortnightly magazine, with a poem each month for a year. He fulfilled his engagement, and received two hundred dollars for the twelve poems which he supplied.

Amongst these were his picturesque poem, "A Forest Hymn," "The Old Man's Funeral," and "The Murdered Traveller."

All Bryant's work, whether in rhyme or blank verse, is carefully finished, and, with such consummate art, that it is perfect, simple, and natural, leaving no trace of the chisel; while his manifest keen enjoyment of the varied aspects of nature, and his powers of accurately describing them, are alike great and marvellous.

Of "A Forest Hymn," Stoddard justly observes:—"The gravity, the dignity, the solemnity of natural devotion, were never before stated so accurately and with such significance. We stand in thought in the heart of a great forest, under its broad roof of boughs, awed by the sacred influences of the place. A gloom which is not painful settles upon us; we are surrounded by mystery and unseen energy. The shadows are full of worshippers and beautiful things that live in their misty twilights."

A FOREST HYMN.

The groves were God's first temples. Ere man learned
To hew the shaft, and lay the architrave,
And spread the roof above them—ere he framed

The lofty vault, to gather and roll back
The sound of anthems; in the darkling wood,
Amid the cool and silence, he knelt down,
And offered to the Mightiest solemn thanks
And supplication. For his simple heart
Might not resist the sacred influences
Which, from the stilly twilight of the place,
And from the gray old trunks that high in heaven
Mingled their mossy boughs, and from the sound
Of the invisible breath that swayed at once
All their green tops, stole over him, and bowed
His spirit with the thought of boundless power
And inaccessible majesty. Ah, why
Should we, in the world's riper years, neglect
God's ancient sanctuaries, and adore
Only among the crowd, and under roofs
That our frail hands have raised? Let me, at least,
Here, in the shadow of this aged wood,
Offer one hymn—thrice happy, if it find
Acceptance in His ear.

Father, thy hand
Hath reared these venerable columns, thou
Didst weave this verdant roof. Thou didst look down
Upon the naked earth, and, forthwith, rose
All these fair ranks of trees. They, in thy sun,
Budded, and shook their green leaves in thy breeze,
And shot toward heaven. The century-living crow
Whose birth was in their tops, grew old and died
Among their branches, till, at last, they stood,
As now they stand, massy, and tall, and dark,
Fit shrine for humble worshipper to hold
Communion with his Maker. These dim vaults,
These winding aisles, of human pomp or pride
Report not. No fantastic carvings show
The boast of our vain race to change the form
Of thy fair works. But thou art here—thou fill'st
The solitude. Thou art in the soft winds

That run along the summit of these trees
In music; thou art in the cooler breath
That from the inmost darkness of the place
Comes, scarcely felt; the barky trunks, the ground,
The fresh moist ground, are all instinct with thee.
Here is continual worship;—Nature, here,
In the tranquillity that thou dost love,
Enjoys thy presence. Noiselessly, around,
From perch to perch, the solitary bird
Passes; and yon clear spring, that, 'midst its herbs,
Wells softly forth and wandering steeps the roots
Of half the mighty forest, tells no tale
Of all the good it does. Thou hast not left
Thyself without a witness, in these shades,
Of thy perfections. Grandeur, strength, and grace
Are here to speak of thee. This mighty oak—
By whose immovable stem I stand and seem
Almost annihilated—not a prince,
In all that proud old world beyond the deep,
E'er wore his crown as loftily as he
Wears the green coronal of leaves with which
Thy hand has graced him. Nestled at his root
Is beauty, such as blooms not in the glare
Of the broad sun. That delicate forest flower,
With scented breath and look so like a smile,
Seems, as it issues from the shapeless mould,
An emanation of the indwelling Life,
A visible token of the upholding Love,
That are the soul of this great universe.

My heart is awed within me when I think
Of the great miracle that still goes on,
In silence, round me—the perpetual work
Of thy creation, finished, yet renewed
Forever. Written on thy works I read
The lesson of thy own eternity.
Lo! all grow old and die—but see again,
How on the faltering footsteps of decay

Youth presses—ever gay and beautiful youth
In all its beautiful forms. These lofty trees
Wave not less proudly that their ancestors
Moulder beneath them. Oh, there is not lost
One of earth's charms: upon her bosom yet,
After the flight of untold centuries,
The freshness of her far beginning lies
And yet shall lie. Life mocks the idle hate
Of his arch-enemy Death—yea, seats himself
Upon the tyrant's throne—the sepulchre,
And of the triumphs of his ghastly foe
Makes his own nourishment. For he came forth
From thine own bosom, and shall have no end.

There have been holy men who hid themselves
Deep in the woody wilderness, and gave
Their lives to thought and prayer, till they outlived
The generation born with them, nor seemed
Less aged than the hoary trees and rocks
Around them;—and there have been holy men
Who deemed it were not well to pass life thus.
But let me often to these solitudes
Retire, and in thy presence reassure
My feeble virtue. Here its enemies,
The passions, at thy plainer footsteps shrink
And tremble and are still. O God! when thou
Dost scare the world with tempests, set on fire
The heavens with falling thunderbolts, or fill,
With all the waters of the firmament,
The swift dark whirlwind that uproots the woods
And drowns the villages; when, at thy call,
Uprises the great deep and throws himself
Upon the continent, and overwhelms
Its cities—who forgets not, at the sight
Of these tremendous tokens of thy power,
His pride, and lays his strifes and follies by?
Oh, from these sterner aspects of thy face
Spare me and mine, nor let us need the wrath

Of the mad unchained elements to teach
Who rules them. Be it ours to meditate,
In these calm shades, thy milder majesty,
And to the beautiful order of thy works
Learn to conform the order of our lives.

In "The Old Man's Funeral" the feeling of man's mortality is "tempered with a philosophy and a hope which had hitherto been wanting in his poetry." From it, we quote three stanzas, which may not inaptly be applied to Bryant himself:—

"Ye sigh not when the sun, his course fulfilled,
His glorious course, rejoicing earth and sky,
In the soft evening, when the winds are stilled,
Sinks where his islands of refreshment lie,
And leaves the smile of his departure, spread
O'er the warm-coloured heaven and ruddy mountain head.

"Why weep ye then for him, who, having won
The bound of man's appointed years, at last,
Life's blessings all enjoyed, life's labours done,
Serenely to his final rest has passed;
While the soft memory of his virtues, yet,
Lingers like twilight hues, when the bright sun is set?

"His youth was innocent; his riper age
Marked with some act of goodness every day;
And watched by eyes that loved him, calm and sage,
Faded his late declining years away.
Meekly he gave his being up, and went
To share the holy rest that waits a life well spent."

How simply and effectively, in ballad form, Bryant tells the pathetic story of "The Murdered Traveller," founded on the following incident, which he himself thus relates:—"Some years since, in the month of May, the remains of a human body, partly devoured by wild

animals, were found in a woody ravine, near a solitary road passing between the mountains west of the village of Stockbridge. It was supposed that the person came to his death by violence, but no traces could be discovered of his murderers. It was only recollected that one evening, in the course of the previous winter, a traveller had stopped at an inn in the village of West Stockbridge; that he had inquired the way to Stockbridge; and that, in paying the innkeeper for something he had ordered, it appeared that he had a considerable sum of money in his possession. Two ill-looking men were present, and went out about the same time that the traveller proceeded on his journey. During the winter, also, two men of shabby appearance, but plentifully supplied with money, had lingered for a while about the village of Stockbridge. Several years afterward, a criminal, about to be executed for a capital offence in Canada, confessed that he had been concerned in murdering a traveller in Stockbridge for the sake of his money. Nothing was ever discovered respecting the name or residence of the person murdered."

The poem consists of nine verses; of which we quote the first four, and the last:—

"When Spring, to woods and wastes around,
Brought bloom and joy again,
The murdered traveller's bones were found,
Far down a narrow glen.

"The fragrant birch, above him, hung
Her tassels in the sky;
And many a vernal blossom sprung,
And nodded careless by.

"The red-bird warbled, as he wrought
His hanging nest o'erhead,
And fearless, near the fatal spot,
Her young the partridge led.

"But there was weeping far away,
And gentle eyes, for him,
With watching many an anxious day,
Were sorrowful and dim.

. . . . . .

"Long, long they looked—but never spied
His welcome step again,
Nor knew the fearful death he died
Far down that narrow glen."

"March" is thought, by many, to be one of the finest poems ever written on that wild and stormy month. Full of melody and simplicity, it is doubtless a gem.

MARCH.

The stormy March is come at last,
With wind, and cloud, and changing skies;
I hear the rushing of the blast,
That through the snowy valley flies.

Ah, passing few are they who speak,
Wild, stormy month! in praise of thee;
Yet, though thy winds are loud and bleak,
Thou art a welcome month to me.

For thou, to northern lands, again
The glad and glorious sun dost bring,
And thou hast joined the gentle train
And wear'st the gentle name of Spring.

And, in thy reign of blast and storm,
Smiles many a long, bright, sunny day,
When the changed winds are soft and warm,
And heaven puts on the blue of May.

Then sing aloud the gushing rills
In joy that they again are free,
And, brightly leaping down the hills,
Renew their journey to the sea.

The year's departing beauty hides
Of wintry storms the sullen threat;
But in thy sternest frown abides
A look of kindly promise yet.

Thou bring'st the hope of those calm skies,
And that soft time of sunny showers,
When the wide bloom, on earth that lies,
Seems of a brighter world than ours.

How full of brilliant colour is the picture he gives us of the New England

AUTUMN WOODS.

Ere, in the northern gale,
The summer tresses of the trees are gone,
The woods of Autumn, all around our vale,
Have put their glory on.

The mountains that infold,
In their wide sweep, the coloured landscape round,
Seem groups of giant kings, in purple and gold,
That guard the enchanted ground.

I roam the woods that crown
The upland, where the mingled splendours glow,
Where the gay company of trees look down
On the green fields below.

. . . . . .

But 'neath yon crimson tree,
Lover to listening maid might breathe his flame,
Nor mark, within its roseate canopy,
Her blush of maiden shame.

Oh, Autumn! why so soon
Depart the hues that make thy forests glad,
Thy gentle wind and thy fair sunny noon,
And leave thee wild and sad!

Ah! 'twere a lot too blest
Forever in thy coloured shades to stray;

Amid the kisses of the soft south-west
To rove and dream for aye;

And leave the vain low strife
That makes men mad—the tug for wealth and power—
The passions and the cares that wither life,
And waste its little hour.

The "Hymn to the North Star," imaginative, yet clear and direct, is remarkable, alike for its comprehensive sweep, and its great condensation:—

"A beauteous type of that unchanging good,
That bright eternal beacon, by whose ray
The voyager of time should shape his heedful way."

The "Song of the Stars," often found in school collections, and beginning thus,

"When the radiant morn of creation broke,
And the world in the smile of God awoke,"

although displaying less originality than the poet's wont, is, nevertheless, a great favourite with the young, who are generally quite fascinated with the subject, and also with the light, motion, and music of its airy rhythm.

Such were some of the poems Bryant wrote at Great Barrington, while attending to professional engagements, and devoted to his home duties. To the first, we have seen him allude, in no very complimentary terms, when he speaks of himself as—

"Forced to drudge for the dregs of men,
And scrawl strange words with a barbarous pen."

Of the second he speaks lovingly, hopefully, and cheerily in "The Lapse of Time," which opens thus:—

"Lament who will, in fruitless tears,
The speed with which our moments fly;

I sigh not over vanished years,
But watch the years that hasten by."

Further on, he alludes, thus pleasantly, to his being a husband and a father:—

"Oh, leave me, still, the rapid flight
That makes the changing seasons gay,
The grateful speed that brings the night,
The swift and glad return of day;

"The months that touch, with added grace,
This little prattler at my knee,
In whose arch eye and speaking face
New meaning every hour I see."

And the poem concludes with the following true and philosophical reflection:—

"Thou fliest and bear'st away our woes,
And as thy shadowy train depart,
The memory of sorrow grows
A lighter burden on the heart."

The delivery of "The Ages" at Harvard College, and the publication of his poems, at once called the attention of literary circles, very markedly, to Bryant. Among many favourable notices, on the appearance of his volume, there was one, very highly commendatory, in the *New York American*, from the pen of Verplanck, a person of influence in the literary and social circles of New York.

"Mr. Verplanck was a frequent visitor at the house of Mr. Henry D. Sedgwick, a substantial man of scholarly tastes, who had gathered about him such literary friends as Cooper, Halleck, Percival, and others distinguished in their day. Mr. Sedgwick made his summer home at Stockbridge, Mass., not far from Great Barrington, and was a friend and admirer of Bryant's."

In this way, these friends came to know him; and desirous that he should attain a wider field for his transcendant genius, continually urged upon him the propriety of settling in New York. He hated law, and liked literature, so that his heart was all along with his advisers.

In 1824, the Sedgwicks prevailed on him to pay his first visit to New York City; and, while there, he was introduced, under the best auspices, to the leading literary men of that metropolis.

Of the impression he made on this visit, Miss Catherine M. Sedgwick writes:—

"We have a great deal of pleasure from a glimpse of Bryant. I never saw him so happy, nor half so agreeable. I think he is very much animated with his prospects. Heaven grant that they may be more than realized! I sometimes feel some misgivings about it; but I think it is impossible that, in the increasing demand for native literature, a man of his resources, who has justly the *first* reputation, should not be able to command a competency. He has good sense, too, good judgment, and moderation. . . . He seems so modest, that every one seems eager to prove to him the merit of which he appears unconscious. I wish you had seen him last evening. Mrs. Nicholas was here, and half a dozen gentlemen. She was ambitious to recite before Bryant. She was very becomingly dressed for the grand ball to which she was going; and, wrought up to her highest pitch of excitement, she recited her favourite pieces better than I ever heard her, and concluded the whole, without request or any note of preparation, by 'The Waterfowl' and 'Thanatopsis.' Bryant's face 'brightened all over,'—was one gleam of light; and, I am certain, at the moment he felt the ecstasy of a poet."

The "prospects" here referred to were the abandonment of law, and the adoption of literature as a profession.

From the first, as we have seen, Bryant was averse to

the profession of law, which circumstances had forced upon him. As his dislike continued to grow, the wish for more congenial occupation, which would at the same time enable him to meet home obligations and responsibilities—he having given hostages to fortune—was great, and this visit, demonstrating the strong likelihood of a suitable opening being soon made for him, so to speak, settled his destiny.

In the winter of 1824–25, his friends wrote that an editorship had actually been procured for him; so, requiring no further persuasion to accept of such an inducement, he joyfully handed over his briefs to a brother barrister, wound up his affairs, and, at once prepared to leave Berkshire for New York City, early in 1825.

At Great Barrington, from his well-known uprightness and ability, he had, for nine years, enjoyed a fair measure of success as a lawyer.

Of this change, from law to literature, John Bigelow, in his address before the Century Club, on November 12, 1878, said:—"An impression has prevailed that Bryant quitted the profession of the law, doubting his fitness to succeed in it. . . . I shall take the liberty of saying that I do not share this opinion. . . . He had a prodigious power of acquiring knowledge, which made him one of the most accomplished men of his age; a mind singularly clear and difficult to sophisticate; habits of industry which would appal most men who think themselves industrious, and a devotion to duty and a fidelity to engagements which would have inspired the unlimited confidence of courts, juries, and clients. All these qualities are too rarely united in any person to leave a doubt that they would have given Bryant a relative eminence at the bar, as incontestable as that which he was destined to obtain in literature."

Dr. Ray Palmer positively states that "he steadily rose in his practice as a lawyer in the courts of the country, and promised to attain a high position."

The Rev. Jahu De Witt Miller also writes, in July, 1878, from Cross River, State of New York:—"I have frequently been asked why Mr. Bryant left the law. Not the least influential among the reasons which prompted him to transfer his allegiance to literature was the trial of the cause of Bloss *v.* Tobey. Tobey said that Bloss had 'burned his own store. There is no doubt in my mind that he burned his own store. He would not have got his goods insured if he had not meant to burn it.' Bloss thereupon sued Tobey for slander, and retained Bryant. The case was tried, and the jury awarded five hundred dollars damages. Tobey's counsel moved the Supreme Court for an arrest of judgment, because the words were not (since it was not an offence for a man to burn his own store) in themselves slanderous. The court decided, Chief-justice Parsons reading the opinion, that simply to burn one's own store is not unlawful when no injury is done or intended to be done to any other person. The court reasoned—that, if Tobey had said that Bloss burnt his own store with the intention of getting the insurance on the goods, such words, since they would have charged him with a criminal offence, would have been slanderous. Judgment was, therefore, set aside! Only a month ago Mr. Bryant, referring to the case, said, 'By a piece of pure chicane, in a case the merits of which were with my client, and were perfectly understood by the parties, the court, the jury, and everybody who heard the trial, or heard of it, my client was turned out of court after the jury had awarded him damages and deprived of what they intended he should receive.' This, as may be imagined, did not much heighten his respect for the law."

There is also a tradition at the local bar, that he had some difference with one of the opposing counsel about the cost of a suit, on which occasion the restrained fire of the poet's temperament, quickened by righteous indignation, blazed fiercely forth, uttering what was only too true to be palatable either to court or counsel. "To his indignant mind," says Curtis, "the law probably seemed, despite Coke's famous words, the perfection of unreason;" and, if many sensible people, who are merely outside onlookers, have come to be pretty much of Bryant's way of thinking, how must the law's constricting serpent-coils be regarded by those who, unfortunately, are the outraged victims of its chicanery; and who have been robbed and ruined, either in accordance with, or in direct violation of, some of its many slimy Protean forms!

The slight thread that had held the poet to law was now broken; "Bryant had tried his last case. He left Berkshire, but while its Monument Mountain stands, and its Green River flows, Berkshire will claim their poet as her own. One of the last of the Berkshire poems was that on 'June,' which was first published in the year after he left Great Barrington, the poet's farewell to

'The glorious sky
And the green mountains round:'

the farewell, whose pensive and airy music was in all hearts and on all lips when he died, as he had fancifully wished, in June."

JUNE.

I gazed upon the glorious sky
And the green mountains round,
And thought that when I came to lie
At rest within the ground,

'Twere pleasant, that in flowery June,
When brooks send up a cheerful tune,
And groves a joyous sound,
The sexton's hand, my grave to make,
The rich, green mountain-turf should break.

A cell within the frozen mould,
A coffin borne through sleet,
And icy clods above it rolled,
While fierce the tempests beat—
Away!—I will not think of these—
Blue be the sky and soft the breeze,
Earth green beneath the feet,
And be the damp mould gently pressed
Into my narrow place of rest.

There through the long, long summer hours,
The golden light should lie,
And thick young herbs and groups of flowers
Stand in their beauty by.
The oriole should build and tell
His love-tale close beside my cell;
The idle butterfly
Should rest him there, and there be heard
The housewife bee and humming-bird.

And what if cheerful shouts at noon
Come, from the village sent,
Or songs of maids, beneath the moon
With fairy laughter blent?
And what if, in the evening light,
Betrothèd lovers walk in sight
Of my low monument?
I would the lovely scene around
Might know no sadder sight nor sound.

I know that I no more should see
The season's glorious show,
Nor would its brightness shine for me,
Nor its wild music flow;

But if, around my place of sleep,
The friends I love should come to weep,
They might not haste to go.
Soft airs, and song, and light, and bloom
Should keep them lingering by my tomb.

These to their softened hearts should bear
The thought of what has been,
And speak of one who cannot share
The gladness of the scene;
Whose part, in all the pomp that fills
The circuit of the summer hills,
Is that his grave is green;
And deeply would their hearts rejoice
To hear again his living voice.

CHAPTER VI.

1825–1830: Literary Associates and Society in New York—Magazine Editing—Takes to Journalism.

Settles in New York—Edits a Monthly Magazine—His Literary Associates—Dana—The Death of the Flowers—Sedgwick's Home—The Sketch Club—Lectures at the National Academy of Design—Magazine Ventures Unsuccessful—Takes to Journalism—Assistant Editor of *Evening Post*—His Literary Status Recognized—The Talisman—On Coleman's Death he becomes Editor of the *Evening Post*—Engages Leggett as Assistant.

Bryant, in 1825, removed to New York, which city continued to be his head-quarters for more than half a century. "Here he lived," says General James Grant Wilson, "from earliest youth to venerable age—from thirty-one to eighty-four—in one path of honour and success."

He at once entered on his duties as the co-editor of a monthly publication, *The New York Review and Athenæum Magazine*, his coadjutor being Henry J. Anderson, afterwards professor of mathematics in Columbia College.

This opening had been got for him by Sedgwick, with

the aid of Verplanck, and in the new literary enterprise the editors were well supported by the literary contributions of Willis, Dana, Bancroft, and Halleck. The very first number contained several notable poems, such as the well-known "Marco Bozzaris" of Halleck, signed simply with the letter H., of which the editor said:—"It would be an act of gross injustice to the author of the above magnificent lyric were we to withhold the expression of our admiration of its extraordinary beauty. We are sure, too, that in this instance, at least, we have done what is rare in the annals of criticism—we have given an opinion from which no one of our readers will feel any inclination to dissent." And, Bryant's own "Song of Pitcairn's Island;" which a contemporary journalist styled "one of the sweetest pictures that a highly cultivated fancy ever drew."

It also (1825) contained Dana's earliest poem, "The Dying Raven," written at the age of thirty-eight, and signed with an anonymous "Y." Thus, in regard to Bryant, although Dana was the older man (born 1787—died 1879), he was the younger poet.

Among other poems and numerous prose articles on art and kindred subjects, Bryant contributed to the pages of the *New York Review* that pensive autumn dirge, "The Death of the Flowers," which is familiar to all readers of good poetry. In it he has embalmed the memory of his sister, in a poem as felicitous in conception as it is exquisitely sweet and musical in expression.

THE DEATH OF THE FLOWERS.

The melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year,
Of wailing winds, and naked woods, and meadows brown and sere.
Heap'd in the hollows of the grove, the autumn leaves lie dead;

They rustle to the eddying gust, and to the rabbit's tread;
The robin and the wren are flown, and from the shrubs the jay,
And from the wood-top calls the crow through all the gloomy day.

Where are the flowers, the fair young flowers, that lately sprang and stood
In brighter light and softer airs, a beauteous sisterhood?
Alas! they all are in their graves, the gentle race of flowers
Are lying in their lowly beds, with the fair and good of ours.
The rain is falling where they lie, but the cold November rain
Calls not from out the gloomy earth the lovely ones again.

The wind-flower and the violet, they perished long ago,
And the brier-rose and the orchis died amid the summer glow;
But on the hill the golden-rod, and the aster in the wood,
And the yellow sun-flower by the brook in autumn beauty stood,
Till fell the frost from the clear cold heaven, as falls the plague on men,
And the brightness of their smile was gone, from upland, glade, and glen.

And now, when comes the calm mild day, as still such days will come,
To call the squirrel and the bee from out their winter home;
When the sound of dropping nuts is heard, though all the trees are still,
And twinkle in the smoky light the waters of the rill,
The south wind searches for the flowers whose fragrance late he bore,
And sighs to find them in the wood and by the stream no more.

And then I think of one who in her youthful beauty died,
The fair meek blossom that grew up and faded by my side.
In the cold moist earth we laid her, when the forests cast the leaf,
And we wept that one so lovely should have a life so brief:
Yet not unmeet it was that one, like that young friend of ours,
So gentle and so beautiful, should perish with the flowers.

The late Bayard Taylor, in alluding to this early

period of American literature, said:—"Dana, Halleck, and Bryant rose together on steadier wings, and gave voices to the solitude: Dana with a broad, grave undertone, like that of the sea; Bryant with a sound as of the wind in summer woods and the fall of waters in mountain dells; and Halleck with strains blown from a silver trumpet, breathing manly fire and courage. Many voices have followed them, but we shall not forget the forerunners who rose in advance of their welcome, and created their own audience by their songs."

"His new position," says General James Grant Wilson, "soon introduced Bryant into a very charming circle, composed of Chancellor Kent; Cooper, just achieving popularity by his American novels; the young poets Halleck, Hillhouse, and Percival; the painters Dunlap, Durand, Inman, and Morse; the scholars Charles King and Verplanck, and many other choice spirits, all long since passed away.

"A few days after the poet's arrival in New York he met Cooper, to whom he had been previously introduced, who said:—

"'Come and dine with me to-morrow; I live at No. 345 Greenwich Street.'

"'Please put that down for me,' said Bryant, 'or I shall forget the place.'

"'Can't you remember three-four-five?' replied Cooper, bluntly.

"Bryant did 'remember three-four-five,' not only for the day, but ever afterward. He dined with the novelist according to appointment, the additional guest, besides Cooper's immediate family, being Fitz-Greene Halleck. The warm friendship of these three gifted men was severed only by death."

The house of his friend Sedgwick, whose sister Catherine was already famous, was the resort of authors and of

all literary strangers. In a humble and unassuming way, it was the Holland House of New York.

In 1825, the year of Bryant's arrival in New York, the Sketch Club was formed and the National Academy of Design was founded. Bryant's love of art led him to lend a helping hand in such ways as were open to him; and, in aid of the Academy, he delivered a course of lectures on Greek and Roman Mythology,—subjects with which he was thoroughly conversant.

In striking contrast to law-drudgery at Great Barrington, such was the congenial society in which Bryant now moved. But, with prudent forethought, as a precautionary measure, on reaching the city in 1825, he procured his admission to the New York Bar; so that if literary projects had failed, he would have had something which he already knew and could do, to fall back upon. However unpleasant and arduous the way, if duty had called, he would have been prepared to follow, in order to achieve what Burns calls the glorious privilege of being independent. Fortunately, he did not require to resume legal practice. His first literary venture, however, did not succeed, so that Bryant and his associates did not long continue their labours for it. Such high-class literature was for the few, and these as yet were not numerous enough to render the *Review* financially remunerative. The day for such a magazine had not arrived, and so, from being too good, the project failed. The *Review*, in its dire struggle for existence, passed through the following vicissitudes: in March, 1826, it was joined to the *Literary Gazette*, bearing the joint name, *The New York Literary Gazette and American Athenæum;* in July of the same year, losing its name, it was merged in the *United States Literary Gazette;* and, in September, after a two months' existence, that name, in turn, became

the *United States Review*, to appear simultaneously in New York and Boston; but, after undergoing so many changes, it only lived one year.

Bryant had, in 1825, been temporarily employed on *The Evening Post*, and, in 1826, when the *New York Review* was discontinued, through Verplanck's influence, he became permanently connected with that paper with which his name is so closely associated. In the first instance he was assistant editor to William Coleman, who, like himself, was a lawyer from Massachusetts, and had founded the paper in 1801.

"It was," Hudson tells us, "in the columns of *The Post* that the celebrated humorous odes known as the 'Croaker Pieces' had appeared, in 1819. They were written by Joseph Rodman Drake. One afternoon about this time, there was a group of young men standing in the vicinity of the Park in New York, just after a shower, admiring a magnificent rainbow. 'If I could have my wish,' said one, 'it would be to lie in the lap of that rainbow and read Tom Campbell.' Immediately another of the group stepped forward and exclaimed, 'You and I must be acquainted! my name is Drake.'—'My name,' said the other, 'is Fitz-Greene Halleck.' Then and there Croaker took in a partner in the production of those popular satirical odes, and the firm became publicly known as 'Croaker & Co.' They created a great deal of amusement, and were much sought after, largely increasing the circulation of the paper."

Although the onerous duties of a daily paper absorbed much of Bryant's time and energy, he, in conjunction with Charles Folsom of Cambridge, continued to edit the *United States Review* till it ceased to exist, and to contribute poems and articles to it, and to other periodical pub-

lications. Henceforth, he devoted himself to journalism as a profession.

To the *Evening Post*, Bryant brought literary experience, solid learning, refined taste, and, even then, the prestige of a well-earned reputation.

His status at this period was justly and generously recognized by his brother bard and friend, Fitz-Greene Halleck, who, in *The Recorder*, thus wrote:—

> "Bryant, whose songs are thoughts that bless
> The heart—its teachers and its joy,
> As mothers blend with their caress
> Lessons of truth and gentleness,
> And virtue for the listening boy.
> Spring's lovelier flowers for many a day
> Have blossomed on his wandering way;
> Beings of beauty and decay,
> They slumber in their autumn tomb;
> But those that graced his own Green River
> And wreathed the lattice of his home,
> Charmed by his song from mortal doom,
> Bloom on, and will bloom on for ever."

From 1827 to 1830 Bryant was associated with Verplanck and Robert C. Sands in editing a very successful annual, called *The Talisman*, the three volumes of which were afterwards issued under the title of *Miscellanies*. Bryant's prose contributions to *The Talisman* were, "An Adventure in the East Indies," "The Cascade of Melsingah," "Recollections of the South of Spain," "A Story of the Island of Cuba," "The Indian Spring," "The Whirlwind," "Phanette des Gaulemes," and "The Marriage Blunder." On Coleman's death, in 1829, Bryant assumed the entire editorial control of the *Evening Post*, and shortly afterwards engaging William Leggett as assistant editor, he put him in training, as to the policy

which he wished inculcated, with the intention of afterwards leaving the paper in his hands, while he himself should pay a lengthened visit, of several years, to Europe, with his wife and family.

CHAPTER VII.

1826–1878: Editorial Career.

Joins the Evening Post—Aims at reforming Journalism—Early Press of North America—American Newspaper Enterprise—William Leggett—Bryant's Tribute to his Memory—Bryant a Prudent and Industrious Man of Business—Editorial Career sketched by Wilson, Bigelow, and others—Bryant's own Idea of a Newspaper—His Course as a Politician—Our Country's Call—Kindly and Charitable—Friendly Relationship to his Staff—A Challenge is sent him—Correct Language and Literary Style—His own Practice in Writing Editorials—Two Lives as Editor and Poet—Influence as a Man and a Journalist—Acquires Competence and Fortune.

The *New York Review* which Bryant edited, and other purely literary enterprises, for the reasons we have stated, did not find sufficient support; so, in 1826, when he was thirty-two years of age, as associate editor of the *Evening Post* under William Coleman, he betook himself to journalism, which henceforth became the profession of his life.

It was the first jubilee year of American Independence. "John Quincy Adams," says Curtis, "was President, a man of unsullied character, of great ability, of resolute independence, superior to party trick or personal intrigue; a civilian, of will as indomitable as that of his military successor, a President — and such may our Presidents always be!—who believed, that he serves his party best who serves his country most. This was the fortunate epoch, and this the happy country, of 1826."

Bryant, during his three years of sub-editorship, learned little from Coleman, who was prosy, crotchety, and per-

verse; but he gained an insight into the requirements of a newspaper, and seeing the many serious defects of the press of that day, he made up his mind to try to rectify them, and so raise the moral and literary tone of journalism, and make it the powerful and important factor in the state which it has since become. This service he felt to be his mission, and resolved to perform.

On Coleman's death, in 1829, he assumed the sole editorial control, and, at length, had full scope for inaugurating his reforms.

To Massachusetts belongs the honour of establishing, at Cambridge, the first printing-press in North America, in 1639, nineteen years after the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers, and nearly half a century in advance of any other press in the colonies.

The first newspaper in America, the *Colonial Press*, appeared in Boston in 1690. It was followed by the *Boston News Letter* in 1704, which continued in existence till 1776. The *New York Gazette*, started on October 23, 1725, was the first newspaper issued in that city. Benjamin Franklin, when a printer's apprentice, assisted and, for a time, when only sixteen years of age, edited and published his brother James's paper, *The New England Courant*, which was established on August 7, 1721, and which was the fifth newspaper started in America. In the year 1728, Franklin successfully started the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on his own account. In 1731 the *South Carolina Gazette* was issued, the first in that province; it was printed at Charleston. In 1733, the *New York Weekly Journal*, an important political organ, was started in New York. The editor, Zenger, was tried for libel, the first prosecution of the kind in America, but acquitted; while his advocate, Andrew Hamilton, was feted and honoured for "the remarkable service done by him to the

city and colony by his learned and generous defence of the rights of mankind and the liberty of the press." The *Daily Advertiser*, started at Philadelphia in 1784, was the first daily paper in the States. Such were the beginnings of journalism in America, since developed so largely, that the United States has become more prolific of newspapers, and newspaper enterprise, than any other country.

Between Great Britain, its Colonies, and the United States, the newspapers published in the English language are largely in excess of those published in all other languages put together. In 1874 there were printed, in round numbers,—

In the English language, . . .	7500
In all other languages, . . .	6600
English over foreign periodicals, .	900

The returns, since 1870, show the relative position of the United States to the rest of the world in periodical literature to be as follows:—

Periodicals published outside the U.S., . .	8250
Periodicals published in the U.S., . . .	6500
Against the U.S., ...	1750

Although no American paper has attained to the circulation of the London *Telegraph* (160,000), the *New York Herald* has at times come near it; and, from the large circulation of many leading American papers, "it is safe to say that the number of copies annually printed in the United States is fully equal to those annually issued in all the other nations of the world."

In the words of Frederic Hudson: — "There is no danger too great, no expedition too remote, too costly, or too extensive, no undertaking too vast, for the American

journalist. If it be to the heart of Africa, or to Khiva, or to the North Pole, or in the thickest of the battle in the rebellion, in Cuba, in Spain, in Asia, or in Germany, correspondents are sure to be present preparing history for all time to come; and now, these journalistic deeds of daring are rewarded by the Iron Cross from the Emperor of Germany, the gold medal from the Royal Geographical Society of England, the order of St. Stanilaus from the Czar of Russia, and larger cheques on the bankers of the newspaper proprietors."

The great advances made in recent journalism may be seen, by comparing copies of the same journal—the *Evening Post*—for 1825, and 1878:—"In the earlier numbers we find news from Albany regarding the session of the Legislature, printed five days after the transactions recorded; extracts from English newspapers nearly a month old; despatches from different points in the United States dated a fortnight earlier than the paper; advertisements of cock-fights; and the time-tables of rapid stage-lines to Philadelphia, Boston, and the West. Bryant lived to see the invention of the electric telegraph, the wedding of the continents by submarine cables, and the organization of the Associated Press." Bryant's appreciation of this progress he more than once expressed in his own felicitous way. His speech at the dinner given to Samuel F. B. Morse, in 1868, is a vivid presentation of some of these marvellous changes:—"Charles Lamb, in one of his papers, remarks that a piece of news, which, when it left Botany Bay, was true to the letter, often becomes a lie before it reaches England. It is the advantage of the telegraph, that it gives you the news before circumstances have had time to alter it. The press is enabled to lay it fresh before the reader. It comes to him like a steak hot from the gridiron, instead of being cooled and made

flavourless by a slow journey from a distant kitchen. A battle is fought three thousand miles away, and we have the news while they are taking the wounded to the hospital. A great orator rises in the British Parliament, and we read his words almost before the cheers of his friends have ceased. An earthquake shakes San Francisco, and we have the news before the people who have rushed into the street have returned to their houses. . . . In the 'Treatise on Bathos,' Pope quotes, as a sample of absurdity not to be surpassed, a passage from some play, I think one of Nat Lee's, expressing the modest wish of a lover:—

> 'Ye gods, annihilate both space and time,
> And make two lovers happy.'

But see what changes a century brings forth! What was then an absurdity, what was arrant nonsense, is now the statement of a naked fact. Our guest has annihilated both space and time in the transmission of intelligence. The breadth of the Atlantic, with all its waves, is as nothing; and, in sending a message from Europe to this continent, the time, as computed by the clock, is some six hours less than nothing."

Shortly after entering on his duties as editor of the *Evening Post* he engaged as assistant William Leggett, a young man of considerable energy, courage, and ability, but apt to be indiscreetly aggressive in the advocacy of anything that awakened his interest, and regardless of the opinions of others. He had just failed in the management of *The Critic*, a weekly paper, which lived for six months; and, subsequently, when Bryant was in Europe, he had, in such ways, seriously damaged the *Evening Post*. He also offended many supporters of the paper, by refusing to admit the coarse illustrations which

were then common in the advertisement columns of most papers. Leggett, judging that they were in bad taste and spoiled the appearance of his sheet, gave peremptory orders to exclude them, and his resolution once taken was as irrevocable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.

Leggett gave his own idea of a journalist as follows—in speaking of Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun:—"A gentleman steady in his principles; of nice honour; abundance of learning; brave as the sword he wears, and bold as a lion; a sure friend and an irreconcilable enemy; who would lose his life readily to serve his country, and would not do a base thing to save it." Those who knew him well, believed that he nearly realized his own conception of what an editor should be; but they, at the same time, felt that "this is hardly a world for such an editor."

Leggett was for ten years connected with the *Evening Post*, but left it, in 1836, to establish *The Plain Dealer*, after the failure of which, he received a consular appointment from President Van Buren.

Bryant speaks of him as studious and courageous almost to excess, adding:—"He took a sort of pleasure in bearding public opinion. He wrote with surprising fluency, and often with eloquence; took broad views of the questions that came before him; and possessed the faculty of rapidly arranging the arguments which occurred to him, in clear order, and stating them persuasively." On Leggett's death in 1839, Bryant paid a glowing tribute to his memory, in which occur the following lines:—

"The words of fire that from his pen
Were flung upon the fervid page,
Still move, still shake the hearts of men,
Amid a cold and coward age.

His love of truth, too warm, too strong
For Hope or Fear to chain or chill,
His hate of tyranny and wrong,
Burn in the breasts he kindled, still."

Many editions of Bryant's poetical works appeared, from which he must have derived a considerable amount of copyright; but he knew that poetry would not yield him bread, and on one occasion remarked to his friend General James Grant Wilson:—"I should have starved if I had been obliged to depend upon my poetry for a living." So he adopted journalism, because he found that, while enabling him to provide for the wants of his family, he, shy and retiring as he was, could in that way best influence the movements of his age, and benefit his country.

As a newspaper editor and proprietor, Bryant the poet was a thorough, industrious, and successful man of business—one who regarded thrift as a virtue, in order that he might afford to be liberal. He defined "prudence" as "wisdom applied to the ordinary affairs of life." In one of his orations he declared that it "includes forecast, one of the highest operations of the intellect, and the due adjustment of means to ends, without which a man is useless to himself and to society, except as a blunderer by whose example others may be warned."

"In all details he was a strict economist, and made economy the rule of the establishment by his example rather than by precepts. Nearly all his editorials were written upon the backs of old letters, which a less conscientious man would have been ashamed to use. His time was carefully economized; and, though he had his hours of relaxation and literary diversion, no fragment of time was wasted. Even his amusements were parts of a comprehensive system."

Although Bryant was a politician in the highest sense of the term, an editoral associate has said of him:—"For every low phase of politics—the struggle for office, the methods of party managers, or the demagogic arguments of place-hunters—he had the heartiest contempt."

Bryant's editorial career has been sketched by competent hands.

General James Grant Wilson writes:—"*The Evening Post* was founded by William Coleman, a lawyer of Massachusetts, its first number being issued on the 16th of November, 1801. Mr. Coleman dying in 1826, the well-remembered William Leggett became its assistant editor, in which capacity he continued for ten years. Mr. Bryant soon after his return from Europe in 1836, upon the retirement of Mr. Leggett, assumed the sole editorial charge of the paper, performing those duties, with intervals of absence, till the 29th day of May, 1878, when he sat at his desk for the last time. To the *Post*, originally a Federal journal, Mr. Bryant early gave a strongly Democratic tone, taking decided ground against all class legislation, and strongly advocating freedom of trade. When his party at a later day passed under the yoke of slavery, the poet followed his principles out of the party, becoming, before the war, a strong Republican. In its management he was for a long time assisted by his son-in-law, Parke Godwin, and John Bigelow, late United States minister to France. Besides these able coadjutors, the *Post* has had the benefit of many eminent writers of prose and verse. . . . At the expiration of the *Post's* first half century, Mr. Bryant prepared a history of the veteran journal, in which his versatile pen and well-stored mind had ample range and material, in men and incidents, to do justice to the very interesting and eventful period through which the paper had passed."

A contemporary—the *Brooklyn Daily Times*—has well said:—"For fifty years he stood at the head of a daily newspaper published in the city of New York—a half century most momentous in the history of the United States, and passed in active aggressive work in the very centre of political, intellectual, and material activity—and during all that time not only has no stain rested upon his character, but he has stood in our midst as a conspicuous example of all that is admirable in journalism, in politics, and in private life.

"In an era of bitter rivalries, of fierce personalities, and ruthless partisanship, he set a conspicuous example, at once of dignity and independence, teaching his contemporaries how wrongs might be redressed, and great principles asserted, without intolerance or the cruel violation of the sanctity of private life.

"A service akin to that which he rendered to literature in general, he performed in a peculiar degree in the arena of political journalism; and if our newspapers have risen above the level on which they stood when Dickens and Trollope held them up to the laughter and scorn of Europe, it is because they have been wise enough to profit by the lesson set by William Cullen Bryant."

John Bigelow, in his address before the Century Club, said:—"From this time forth, and until the close of his long life, a period of fifty-two years, Mr. Bryant continued in the editorship of the *Evening Post.*

"He never engaged in any other business enterprise; he never embarked in any financial speculations; he was never an officer of any other financial or industrial corporation, nor did he ever accept any political office or trust. He had found an employment at last that was entirely congenial to him, and one which most fully economized his temperament and faculties for the public

service. And he was as loyal to his profession as it was to him.

"I think it quite safe to say that for five days out of every week, during at least forty-two of his fifty-two years of editorial service, Mr. Bryant was at his editorial desk before eight o'clock in the morning, and left the daily impress of his character and genius in some form upon the columns of his journal. When the length of his career as editor is considered, it may be assumed that Mr. Bryant was one of the most voluminous prose writers that ever lived, and to this audience I need hardly add, one of the best. It would be difficult to name a single topic of national importance or which has occupied any considerable share of public attention during the last half century upon which Bryant did not find occasion to form and publish an opinion—an opinion too which always commanded the respect, if not the adhesion, of his readers.

"Though journalism is a comparatively modern profession it is already divided into schools, two of which are well defined.

"One aims to daguerreotype the events and humours of the day, whatever they may be; the other, to direct and shape those events and humours to special standards. One is merely a reflector of what passes across its field; the other, a lens converging the news of the day like the rays of light in specific directions. One is the school of the real, and the other of the ideal. A journal of the former class—of which the London *Times* and the New York *Herald* are perhaps the most distinguished specimens today—is essentially an ephemeron. Each day's publication is complete, having no necessary dependence upon any publication preceding or to follow it. It is simply the living body of that portion of time which has elapsed since its previous issue. It masquerades with its readers

in the idolatry or passion of to-day, and to-morrow, perhaps, with them it clothes itself in the sackcloth and ashes of repentance. The other school aims to control and direct society; to teach and to lead it; to tell, not so much what it has been doing as what it ought to do, or to have done. As such it must be consistent with itself, and teach its doctrines, in their purity, irrespective of the fluctuations of public opinion.—"It was to the latter school of journalism that Mr. Bryant belonged. The amelioration of society was the warp with which he was always striving to interweave the woof of current events.

"I will not undertake to say which of these two schools of journalism is the more useful. Both are useful; neither can be spared; but they invite very different orders of mind and a very diffierent range of accomplishments."

Bryant certainly regarded a newspaper as a moral force which might mould opinion, shaping, elevating, and preparing the public mind for right measures, as well as giving it early and reliable information. Therefore he conceived it to be an editor's duty to judge and treat of the bearing of current events, and conscientiously, up to the light within him, to "interpret their meaning, for the benefit of society and the state." And nobly did Bryant, during his whole career, endeavour to carry out this idea! "He used the newspaper, conscientiously, to advocate views of political and social subjects which he believed to be correct."

"In connection with his economic and political teaching, Bryant strove to make the *Post* an educational power among its readers, by diffusing scientific and practical information, and by stimulating the public mind to the enjoyment of literature and art. The public health was ever dear to him, and he was interested in every sanitary improvement."

"During the period embraced in his editorial career the most important questions which the republic has had to decide since its birth came up for discussion. He saw slavery contending for an extension of power and territory, succeeding for a time and then overwhelmed in final disaster. He witnessed the struggles over the United States Bank, took part in the defence of the sub-treasury scheme, and, when the war imposed upon the country an irredeemable paper currency, he assisted in the still unfinished effort to secure a return to the system which the founders of the Republic so wisely believed to be the best for the nation. He early discovered the evils of a protective tariff system, and for no cause did he labour more zealously and constantly than for that of striking from our foreign trade the shackles which still embarrass it. During his editorial career he was called upon to criticise the administrations of Presidents Jackson, Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler, Polk, Taylor, Fillmore, Pierce, Buchanan, Lincoln, Grant, and Hayes. This bare statement is sufficient to show the wide extent of the subjects which came under his notice."

Through many conflicting measures, amid national changes of policy, Bryant steered his way "right onward," guided ever by the love of truth and patriotism.

It is apart from our purpose here, further to enter upon the history, or follow the course of American politics. Suffice it to say, that Bryant systematically opposed what he believed to be wrong, and supported those measures which he believed to be right, quite independently of party, and ever recommended what he believed to be for the good of his country.

His deep-grounded and comforting belief, giving the key to his high political aspiration, is embodied in his well-known lines:—

"Truth crushed to earth shall rise again;
The eternal years of God are hers:
But Error, wounded, writhes with pain
And dies among her worshippers."

Thus, although the ship of state frequently changed her course, he, like the needle true to the pole, remained unchanged, and was, in turn, claimed by all parties. "He had been a Federalist, a Democrat, and a Republican; but all were only names of the various uniforms in which he served the same cause, the cause of his youth and of his age—the cause of America, and of human nature."

He advocated "liberty, not license," and, even in earlier democratic days, Bryant had no liking whatever for mob-law, but was truly and wisely conservative.

When the North selfishly imposed restrictive tariffs on the South, he unhesitatingly opposed that policy. Indeed, for half a century he consistently advocated free trade; and this, at a time when all other journals in the Free States were opposed to it, and he had to fight the battle single-handed. Yet when the South wished unconstitutionally to resist these imposts, he, holding firmly by the Union, told them, as decidedly, that such a mode of redress was wrong.

Then, again, when the South was bent on extending and perpetuating slavery, and abolitionists, in order to restrict and eradicate it, were urging coercive measures, which he thought would imperil the constitution, he, in the spring of 1856, condemned the policy of the South, and contended for the right of free discussion in the North.

He had formed very distinctly pronounced views on the subject, but had diligently schooled his naturally fiery nature into judicial calmness, in order to retain his influence for good, at the time when it should most be needed.

In consequence of this partial reserve, he was sometimes slightly misunderstood, and thought cool in the good cause, by a few of the more outspoken anti-slavery advocates who did not know him. Bryant had himself gone south, and, there, seen much with his own eyes. He forgot nothing, and consequently knew the reality of that cruel, degrading, and accursed system, which was, in truth, "the sum of all villainies." "In his letters from the Southern States and the West Indies, as late as 1849, there is a photographic fidelity of detail in descriptions of slavery and of the slaves, but they are the pictures of a seemingly passionless observer. There is no apparent sense of wrong, no flaming indignation, no denunciation; an occasional impulsive expression only shows his feelings. This restraint and moderation, however, always so characteristic, are most impressive, and give to his prose, whether in letters, or addresses, or editorial articles, however strong the public feeling or hot the debate, the weight and value which so often exhale in greater fervour of expression. But the breath of the tropics did not relax his moral fibre. The loiterer at the negro corn-shucking in Carolina and in the orange groves of Florida, the tranquil stranger in the Cuban coffee estates and the sugar plantations of Mantanzas, who observed everything and quietly asked a traveller's questions, was not untrue to the spirit that he had inhaled with his native breath among the northern hills. Through all the great slavery contest from 1820 to 1861, which included the prime of his manhood, Bryant's course was determined by his own love of liberty and justice, by his temperament and conscience."

He had hoped against hope that "the domestic institution" would, on the grounds of humanity, and even from motives of economy and self-interest, have been got

quit of without bloodshed; but when the crisis at length came, which he had long foreseen must come in one form or another, he was whole-heartedly with the North. In the preservation of the Union, at any cost of blood or treasure, he clearly read the doom of slavery. The solution presented itself through war-clouds, and he accepted it.

In 1862, he penned a patriotic appeal, which, like the sound of a trumpet, roused thousands to join the ranks. It was called "Our Country's Call;" we give the first and the last verses:—

OUR COUNTRY'S CALL.

Lay down the axe; fling by the spade;
Leave in its track the toiling plough;
The rifle and the bayonet blade
For arms like yours were fitter now;
And let the hands that ply the pen
Quit the light task, and learn to wield
The horseman's crooked brand, and rein
The charger on the battle-field.

. . . . . .

Few, few were they whose sword of old
Won the fair land in which we dwell;
But we are many, we who hold
The grim resolve to guard it well.
Strike, for that broad and goodly land,
Blow after blow, till men shall see
That Might and Right move hand in hand,
And glorious must their triumph be!

Bryant was full of charity, and his condemnations were of measures—not men.

"It is a curious fact," says an editorial associate, "that in recalling these conversations, guided as they

always were by the circumstances of the moment, and spontaneous as his utterances were, I cannot recall a single instance in which Mr. Bryant said a harsh, or even a mildly condemnatory thing of any human being. He was vigorous in his condemnation of unworthy things, unworthy acts, and unworthy principles of action; but nothing that he ever said in my presence indicated his dislike for any man, although I have heard him talk of men whom he must have detested, unless he was free from the otherwise universal human tendency to detest the man who does detestable acts."

Not only in the political arena was he always patriotic, but, "throughout Bryant's life, his scattered poems upon political events, at home and abroad, have been consecrated to freedom and its devotees. He breathed a spirit of independence with the wind of his native hills."

Of his pleasant relationship to the members of his editorial staff, an associate writes:—"He was reserved always by nature, but his reserve was rather that of shy modesty than that of conscious worth, and in his intercourse with his associates in the office of the *Evening Post* he was always singularly frank and easy. He even avoided that appearance of superior authority which is almost inseparable from the exercise of control over the working of a newspaper staff. His few and infrequent commands were requests always, and not only so, they were requests framed in the language, and uttered in the tone of one who asks a favour, not of one who merely wishes to disguise a command.

"Notwithstanding his age and his chiefship in the office, he never, to my knowledge, sent for any member of his staff to come to him; if he had aught to say, he went to the person to whom he wished to say it. He would pass through the editorial rooms with a cheery

'good morning;' he would sit down by one's desk and talk, if there was aught to talk about; or, if asked a question while passing, would stand while answering it, and frequently would relate some anecdote suggested by the question, or offer some apt quotation to illustrate the subject under discussion.

"Mr. Bryant's tenderness of the feelings of other persons, and his earnest desire always to avoid the giving of unnecessary pain, were very marked. 'Soon after I began to do the duties of literary editor,' continues an associate, 'Mr. Bryant, who was reading a review of a little book of wretchedly halting verse, said to me: 'I wish you would deal very gently with poets, especially with the weaker ones.' Later, I had a very bad case of poetic idiocy to deal with, and as Mr. Bryant happened to come into my room while I was debating the matter in my mind, I said to him that I was embarrassed by his injunction to deal gently with poets, and pointed out to him the utter impossibility of finding anything to praise or lightly to condemn in the book before me. After I had read some of its stanzas to him, he answered: 'No, you can't praise it, of course; it won't do to lie about it, but'—turning the volume in his hand and inspecting it—'you might say that the binding is securely put on, and that—well, the binder has planed the edges pretty smooth.'"

Yet this tender-hearted, reserved, strongly-built, athletic man was not to be trifled with. In early editorial days his controversies sometimes brought him into unpleasant relations with his contemporaries. A democratic editor, exasperated by certain statements in the *Post*, sent a challenge to its editor. Duelling in New York had, at that time, become less fashionable than it had been in previous years, and was rightly disappearing before the light. "The belligerent editor who challenged

Bryant had previously had a brush with his testy associate, William Leggett; and had invited that gentleman to be killed by him, but in vain. In his reply to Holland's messenger, Bryant neither accepted nor declined the challenge, but said, that, when his antagonist had finished Leggett, his turn would come next! Thus the difficulty ended."

Another version of the affair is, that Mr. Bryant received the challenge coolly, and immediately replied to it in a note, which ended in words to this effect: "Were you a gentleman, and not a scoundrel, I should take some notice of you. But you are a scoundrel." The subject of this terse, and, we doubt not, true characterization, quiesced, and the affair was not heard of again.

As an editor he felt it educationally incumbent upon him not only to consider matter, but manner, in the forms of literary expression; and he strove to perfect both. On May 11th, 1827, the following paragraph appeared in the *Evening Post:*—

"Affectations of Expression.—We are tired of the affectations which are often to be met with in some of our newspapers, and cannot but express a hope that they will be totally discarded, since they cannot be justified—such, for instance, as 'over' a signature, in the Washington newspapers; 'consolate,' in those of Kentucky; 'was being built,' a late innovation of some English authors, and copied here; 'the Misses Gillingham,' in several publications. These are all that offer themselves at this time, and ought to be corrected, as being neither correct English nor pleasant to the ear, nor expressive of any new idea."

"This," says one of his editorial associates, "was but the beginning of a half century's crusade against inelegance and inaccuracy in the use of our mother tongue. Outside of the line of his professional duty he sometimes

wielded his literary pruning-knife, and, as an example of the good use he made of it, we may quote this letter, which was sent to a young man who asked for a criticism upon an article he had written:—

"My young friend,—I observe that you have used several French expressions in your letter. I think if you will study the English language that you will find it capable of expressing all the ideas that you may have. I have always found it so, and in all that I have written I do not recall an instance where I was tempted to use a foreign word but that, on searching, I have found a better one in my own language.

"Be simple, unaffected; be honest in your speaking and writing. Never use a long word, when a short one will do as well.

"Call a spade by its name, not a well-known oblong instrument of manual labour; let a home be a home and not a residence; a place, not a locality, and so on of the rest. When a short word will do you will always lose by a long one. You lose in clearness; you lose in honest expression of meaning; and, in the estimation of all men who are capable of judging, you lose in reputation for ability.

"The only true way to shine, even in this false world, is to be modest and unassuming. Falsehood may be a thick crust, but, in the course of time, truth will find a place to break through. Elegance of language may not be in the power of us all, but simplicity and straightforwardness are."

Of his own practice in writing editorials we are told, "He measured his contributions to the paper rather by quality than quantity. When asked how he had managed to preserve his style in such purity under the deteriorating influences of his exacting profession, he replied, 'If my style has fewer defects than you expect, it is for the reason, I suppose, which Dr. Johnson gave Boswell for conversing so well: 'I always write my best.' When reminded of the daily emergencies when there is

no time to choose words, and the only alternative to a hasty article is none at all, he answered, 'I would sooner the paper would go to press without an editorial article than send to the printer one I was not satisfied with.'"

"His prose labours," says Stedman, "were an outlet, constantly afforded in his journalism, through which much of that energy escaped, which otherwise would have varied the motives and increased the body of his song. It was in every way as perfect as his verse, as clearly prose, as that was poetry."

Of his prose writings, a critic has ably said, "They contain no superfluous word, no empty or showy phrase, but are marked throughout by pure, manly, straightforward, and vigorous English;" while his poems are characterized by "extreme purity and elegance in the choice of words, a compact and vigorous diction, great delicacy of fancy and elevation of thought, and a genial yet solemn and religious philosophy. As a minute observer of Nature he is almost without a rival among poets."

A contemporary, the *New York Tribune*, pays the following well-merited tribute to Bryant's pure and admirable style:—

"As a writer of prose Mr. Bryant would have, perhaps, enjoyed a more brilliant reputation if he had been less distinguished in the walks of poetry. His acute political disquisitions, his admirable narratives of foreign travel, and his suggestive critical papers, which would have made the fame of a less eminent writer, are comparatively little known, and, as we think, somewhat to the disadvantage of the younger race of writers in this country, who would find in the study of these productions many choice lessons in the art of composition. The language contains few more perfect models of the simple graces of style, of chaste descriptive power, and of the nameless felicities of expression which diffuse a subtle charm over the most unpretending prose like the odours from a bank of violets."

General James Grant Wilson, in his Memoir of Bryant published in the memorial number prefixed to *A New Library of Poetry and Song*, which was edited by the venerable poet, finely says:—"Bryant's prose has always received high commendation. A little collection of extracts from his writings has been compiled for use in schools, as a model of style. The secret of it, so far as genius can communicate its secrets, may be found in a letter addressed by Mr. Bryant to one of the editors of the *Christian Intelligencer*, in reply to some questions, and published in the issue of that journal, July 11th, 1878:—

"'Roslyn, Long Island, July 6, 1863.

. . . . . .

"'It seems to me that in style we ought first, and above all things, to aim at clearness of expression. An obscure style is, of course, a bad style. In writing we should always consider not only whether we have expressed the thought in a manner which meets our own comprehension, but whether it will be understood by readers in general.

"'The quality of style next in importance is attractiveness. It should invite and agreeably detain the reader. To acquire such a style, I know of no other way than to contemplate good models and consider the observations of able critics. The Latin and Greek classics of which you speak are certainly important helps in forming a taste in respect to style, but to attain a good English style something more is necessary—the diligent study of good English authors. I would recur for this purpose to the elder worthies of our literature—to such writers as Jeremy Taylor, and Barrow, and Thomas Fuller—whose works are perfect treasures of the riches of our language. Many modern writers have great excellences of style, but few are without some deficiency. . . .

"'I have but one more counsel to give in regard to the formation of a style in composition, and that is, to read the poets—the nobler and grander ones of our language. In this way warmth and energy is communicated to the diction, and a musical flow to the sentences.

"'I have here treated the subject very briefly and meagrely, but I have given you my own method, and the rules by which I have been guided through many years mostly passed in literary labours and studies.'"

Bryant, at the editorial desk, was in the thick of the conflict of men and measures. At home, in his quiet library or in the open air, he held sweet, calm intercourse with the wise of all ages and with Nature, and found leisure to commune with his own heart, thus preserving the freshness and balance of his powers.

Curtis says that "Bryant, for half a century, with conscience and knowledge, with power and unquailing courage, did his part in holding the hand and heart of his country true to her now glorious ideal.

"During all this time the sturdy political editor was the chief literary figure in the city. Mr. Bigelow says that he never mingled or confounded his two vocations, that they were two distinct currents of intellectual life. This is doubtless true. But it is the same breath of the organ that thunders through the trumpet stop, and whispers in the *vox humana*. In the earlier legends, it is the poet who leads the warriors, and the earlier legends were justified when the poet of 'Thanatopsis' and 'The Waterfowl' came down from the hills to the newspaper office."

The Rev. Henry W. Bellows, D.D., in his funeral address, said, "That he should have succeeded, in keeping the poetic temperament and the tastes and pursuits of a poet fully alive, under the active and incessant pressure of his journalistic labours—making his bread and his immediate influence as a citizen and a leader of public sentiment by editorial work, while he 'built the lofty rhyme' for the gratification of his genius and for the sake of beauty and art, without one glance at immediate suffrages or rewards—if not a solitary, is at least a per-

fect, example of the union in one man of the power to work with nearly equal success in two planes, where what he did in one did not contradict or conflict with what he did in the other, while they were not mingled or confounded. Nobody detects the editor, the politician, the man of business, in Bryant's poetry, and few feel the poet in his editorial writings; but the man of conscience, of humanity, of justice and truth, of purity and honour, appears equally in both."

An old acquaintance of Bryant's, in his recollections of him, tells us: "To one who expressed some surprise that he could submit to the drudgery connected with the issue of a daily paper, he remarked that every one had his allotted work, and must find his happiness in its performance. If God had made any men seers of the beautiful, they were not to seclude themselves from the world where work was to be done for humanity and for God. He spoke with disapprobation of men retiring voluntarily from any useful service. He regarded experience as a talent which no one had a right to hide in a napkin."

Of Bryant's two lives, Bigelow, who had ample opportunities of knowing, said, in his address before the Century Club:—"As Bryant, from the day he embarked in journalism, continued a journalist until the close of his life, so, from a yet earlier period of his life to its close, he never ceased to be a poet; reminding us of Cowley's remark, that it is seldom seen that the poet dies before the man. But Bryant never confounded the two vocations in any way, or allowed either to interfere to any appreciable extent with the other. They constituted two separate and distinct currents of intellectual life, one running through the other, if you please, but never mixing with it, as the Gulf-stream winds its way through

the broad Atlantic, though always distinguished from it by its higher temperature. . . . He used his feet for walking and he used his wings for flying, but he never attempted to fly with his feet nor to run with his wings. He earned his bread, and he fought the battle of life with his journal; but he made no secret of the fact that he looked to his verses for the perpetuation of his name. When he put on his singing robes he practically withdrew from the world and went up into a high mountain, where the din and clamour of professional life in which he habitually dwelt was inaudible. On those occasions

'His soul was like a star and dwelt apart.'

"When the semi-centennial anniversary of the *Evening Post* was approaching, I proposed to him to prepare for its columns a sketch of its career. He cheerfully accepted the task, and, in order that he might be free from interruption, I recommended him to go down to his country home at Roslyn and remain there till it was finished, and let me send him there such of the files of the paper as he might have occasion to consult. He rejected the proposal as abruptly as if I had asked him to offer sacrifices to Apollo. He would allow no such work to follow him there. Not even the shadow of his business must fall upon the consecrated haunts of his Muse."

His son-in-law, Mr. Parke Godwin,—who, along with the Hon. John Bigelow, whose name is known in literature and diplomacy, assisted in the conduct of the paper, and brought both enterprise and literary skill to the aid of the editor-in-chief,—also states that Bryant always wrote his editorials in the office and never at his home, adding, "He steadily refused to carry the shop with him; seldom, if ever, conversing on the exciting questions of the day at his home,—preferring to read some fascinating

book, or to talk on general topics with cultivated friends. By this means he was enabled to bring to his desk a mind ever alert and fresh, fancies ever new, and language that was choice and picturesque."

"As we look back," says Professor David J. Hill, "over the half-century of Bryant's life as an editor, we learn two important lessons. The first is, that the highest literary character can be maintained by one who is daily engaged in the practical discussions of his time; the second is, that personal nobility of mind, and integrity of life, may be preserved in the midst of political controversy. To have taught these lessons alone is a sufficient result for a lifetime of toil and sacrifice. . . .

"It is sometimes remarked that Bryant wrote little; and, if we have in mind only what he has published in books, this is true. If, however, we take into the account his editorial contributions during the fifty-two years of his connection with the *Post*, he is one of the most voluminous writers that ever lived. At a moderate average, his editorials alone would fill more than a hundred duodecimo volumes of five hundred pages each—a mass of literature that no American writer has exceeded. And, what is more important, most of these writings are fairly worthy of the name *literature*, whether we consider the topics, ranging through the whole realm of public questions for half a century; the originality of treatment, often disclosing the widest scholarship and the most profound reflection; or the style, always pure, clear, and forcible, and often chastely elegant. Behind this editor's desk there sat a master of many languages, a traveller in foreign lands, a student of various sciences, a poet of unquestioned genius, a moralist of high principles, a critic of keen penetration."

"In all the long, tumultuous years of his editorial life,"

says Curtis, "does any memory, however searching or censorious, recall one line that he wrote which was not honest and pure, one measure that he defended except from the profoundest conviction of its usefulness to the country, one cause that he advocated which any friend of liberty, of humanity, or of good government would deplore?"

And Bellows said of him, "None could long doubt the honesty, the conscientiousness, the elevation and purity of his convictions or his utterances. . . . And what moderation, candour, and courage he carried into his editorial work! Purity of thought, elegance and simplicity of style, exquisite taste and high morality characterized all he wrote."

To the great influence which Bryant exerted, through the columns of the *Post*, the American contemporary press, at his death, freely and ungrudgingly bore testimony. As a specimen, we quote the following paragraph from the columns of the *New York Herald:*—

"Although Mr. Bryant's enduring fame will rest chiefly upon his productions in verse, poetry was only his recreation —an intellectual pastime amid graver employments. The chief occupation of his life was that of a journalist, or rather of a publicist, for he aimed rather to guide the public judgment than to furnish the community with news. He was an editor of the *Evening Post* for more than fifty years, and during this long period his influence was always actively felt in the politics of the country. Every journalist has reason to be proud of a profession, which so gifted and illustrious a man did not think unworthy of his abilities."

"Pursuing beyond the age of fourscore, an energetic literary career," says his friend General James Grant Wilson, "the poet was also an active co-labourer in all worthy movements to promote the advancement of the

arts and literature. A liberal patron of art himself, he was always the judicious and eloquent advocate of the claims of artists. . . . Philanthropic in his nature, Bryant was ever the consistent promoter of all subjects having for their tendency the elevation of the race and the furtherance of the interests of humanity."

The following terse and just characterization of Mr. Bryant as a political journalist, taken from an article which appeared in the editorial column of the *Post* since his death, gives an admirable summary of the man's life and work:—

"Mr. Bryant's political life was so closely associated with his journalistic life, that they must necessarily be considered together. He never sought public office; he repeatedly refused to hold it. He made no effort either to secure or to use influence in politics, except through his newspaper and by his silent, individual vote at the polls. The same methods marked his political and his journalistic life. He could be a stout party man upon occasion, but only when the party promoted what he believed to be right principles. When the party with which he was accustomed to act did what according to his judgment was wrong, he would denounce and oppose it as readily and as heartily as he would the other party. . . .

"He looked upon the journal which he conducted, as a conscientious statesman looks upon the official trust which has been committed to him, or the work which he has undertaken —not with a view to do what is to be done to-day in the easiest or most brilliant way, but so to do it that it may tell upon what is to be done to-morrow, and all other days, until the worthiest object of ambition is achieved. This is the most useful journalism; and, first and last, it is the most effective and influential."

Thus we have seen, that, from the very beginning of his long career as a journalist, in the *Evening Post*, Bryant avoided the personalities which were then too common in

controversy, and steadily aimed at reforming and elevating the general tone of the press; while the candour, literary experience, learning, and refined taste which he brought to bear on his work, soon began to tell favourably, and, at length, firmly and deservedly established the position of the *Post*, as an influential and leading power, in the very front rank of American newspapers. It was also a financial success; thus, by conscientious rectitude and unremitting labour, he acquired a competent fortune, and, at his death, the poet, it is said, was able to leave a hundred thousand pounds to his family.

CHAPTER VIII.

1827–1832: Literary Work—Poems Published in New York and London—Volume Favourably Received—Poems and Translations.

Tales of the Glauber Spa—Sands—Poems Published in London—Washington Irving—Professor Wilson and Halleck's Opinion of them—Bryant's Theory of Poetry—The Poet—Stedman and Ray Palmer on Bryant—Poems—Winter Piece—The Summer Wind—Wooing Song—The African Chief—The Gladness of Nature—Summer Ramble—The Past—The Evening Wind—Innocent Child—To the Fringed Gentian—Translations—The Life of the Blessed—Love in the Age of Chivalry—The Love of God.

For some time after joining the *Evening Post* in 1826, Bryant found leisure to do a good deal of literary work. Associated with Verplanck and Robert C. Sands, as we have already seen, he edited the *Talisman* from 1827 to 1830.

Washington Irving, in 1827, writing from Spain to his friend Henry Brevoort, said:—"I have been charmed with what I have seen of the writings of Bryant and Halleck. Are you acquainted with them? I should like to know something of them personally. Their vein of thinking is

quite above that of ordinary men and ordinary poets, and they are masters of the magic of poetical language."

In 1832, Bryant also contributed two stories—"Medfield" and "The Skeleton's Cave"—to the *Tales of the Glauber Spa*, a miscellany in two volumes, in which were contributions from Paulding, Leggett, Sands, and Miss Sedgwick. That same year, Sands suddenly died of apoplexy, at the age of thirty-three. The pen was in his hand, and he had just written the ominous line,

"Oh! think not my spirit among you abides,"

in an imaginary account of Esquimaux literature on which he was engaged, when he was called away. He was a man of decided ability as a journalist, humourist, poet, and classical scholar; and, after his death, Verplanck and Bryant collected and jointly edited his works.

In 1832, all the poems written by Bryant previous to that date were also collected and published at New York. Verplanck, who was acquainted with Washington Irving, then Secretary of the American Legation in London, and whose position as a literary man was already established on both sides of the Atlantic, sent a copy of the volume to Irving, accompanied with a private note, requesting his influence in finding a publisher, and introducing the young poet to the British public.

Immediately before publication in New York, Bryant himself also addressed the following letter to Washington Irving:—

"New York, Dec. 29, 1831.

"Sir,—I have put to press in this city a duodecimo volume of two hundred and forty pages, comprising all my poems which I thought worth printing, most of which have already appeared. Several of them, I believe, you have seen; and of some, if I am rightly informed, you have been pleased to express a favourable opinion. Before publishing the work

here, I have sent a copy of it to Murray, the London bookseller, by whom I am desirous that it should be published in England. I have taken the liberty—which I hope you will pardon a countryman of yours, who relies on the known kindness of your disposition to plead his excuse—of referring him to you. As it is not altogether impossible that the work might be republished in England if I did not offer it myself, I could wish that it might be published by a respectable bookseller in a respectable manner.

"I have written to Mr. Verplanck, desiring him to give me a letter to you on the subject; but, as the packet which takes out my book will sail before I can receive an answer, I have presumed so far on your goodness as to make the application myself. May I ask of you the favour to write to Mr. Murray on the subject as soon as you receive this? In my letter to him I have said nothing of the terms, which of course will depend upon circumstances which I may not know, or of which I cannot judge. I should be glad to receive something for the work; but, if he does not think it worth his while to give anything, I had rather that he should take it for nothing, than that it should not be published by a respectable bookseller.

"I must again beg you to excuse the freedom I have taken. I have no persoual acquaintance in England whom I could ask to do what I have ventured to request of you, and I know of no person to whom I could prefer the request with greater certainty that it will be kindly entertained.—I am, sir, with sentiments of the highest respect, your obedient humble servant, WILLIAM C. BRYANT.

"P.S.—I have taken the liberty to accompany this letter with a copy of the work."

Irving, struck by the freshness and beauty of Bryant's poems, with his usual kindness, cordially undertook the friendly task for one whom as yet he had never met. He argued, that, as the British public had appreciated the graphic descriptions of American scenery and wild wood-

land characters contained in the works of Cooper, they would also be delighted with Bryant's grand and characteristic merit — namely, his nationality and power of delineating American landscape, especially "in its wild, solitary, and magnificent forms;" and this in language always classic, pure, lucid, and perfect.

Irving at once communicated with Murray the publisher; for financial reasons, however, he was not then open to entertain the volume; but Andrews, a bookseller in Bond Street, was willing to undertake it, provided Irving would write an introduction and edit it; which he did.

The dedication was addressed to Samuel Rogers, and, in it, Irving thus expressed his true appreciation of Bryant's genius when characterizing his poems:—"They transport us into the depths of the solemn primeval forest, to the shores of the lonely lake, the banks of the wild, nameless stream, or the brow of the rocky upland, rising like a promontory from amidst a wide ocean of foliage; while they shed around us the glory of a climate fierce in its extremes, but splendid in all its vicissitudes. His close observation of the phenomena of nature, and the graphic felicity of his details, prevent his descriptions from ever becoming general and commonplace; while he has the gift of shedding over them a pensive grace that blends them all into harmony, and of clothing them with moral associations that make them speak to the heart. Neither, I am convinced, will it be the least of his merits, in your eyes, that his writings are imbued with the independent spirit and buoyant aspirations incident to a youthful, a free, and a rising country." And, in comparing Bryant with Cooper, he says:—"The same keen eye and just feeling for nature, the same indigenous style of thinking and local peculiarity of imagery, which give such novelty and interest to the pages of that gifted writer, will be

found to characterize this volume, condensed into a narrower compass, and sublimated into poetry."

In the following letter, Bryant expressed his gratitude to Irving:—

"New York, April 24, 1832.

"My dear Sir,—I have received a copy of the London edition of my poems forwarded by you. I find it difficult to express the sense I entertain of the obligation you have laid me under by doing so much more for me in this matter than I could have ventured, under any circumstances, to expect. Had your kindness been limited to procuring the publication of the work, I should still have esteemed the favour worthy of my particular acknowledgment; but by giving it the sanction of your name, and presenting it to the British public with a recommendation so powerful as yours on both sides of the Atlantic, I feel that you have done me an honour in the eyes of my countrymen and of the world.

"It is said that you intend shortly to visit this country. Your return to your native land will be welcomed with enthusiasm, and I shall be most happy to make my acknowledgments in person.—I am, sir, very sincerely yours,

Wm. C. Bryant."

This same year, Bryant tells us, while he was hovering on the skirts of the Indian war, Washington Irving returned home from his long sojourn in Europe, and he had the pleasure of making his personal acquaintance.

Bryant's poems were everywhere well received in Great Britain. On the appearance of the volume, Christopher North wrote a kindly and favourable notice of it in *Blackwood's Magazine:* "The chief charm of Bryant's poetry," said he, "consists in a tender pensiveness, a moral melancholy, breathing over all his contemplations, dreams, and reveries, even such as are in the main glad, and giving assurance of a pure spirit, benevolent to all living creatures, and habitually pious in the felt omni-

presence of the Creator. . . . It overflows with what Wordsworth calls 'the religion of the gods.' The reverential awe of the irresistible pervades the verses entitled 'Thanatopsis' and 'A Forest Hymn,' imparting to them a sweet solemnity, which must affect all thinking hearts."

From this time, Bryant's reputation stood as high in Europe as it did in America, where, also, his poems continued to be more and more appreciated and praised. Halleck, on a subsequent occasion, after repeating from memory the whole of Bryant's beautiful poem, "The Planting of the Apple Tree," which he had taken the pains to transcribe, said to General James Grant Wilson, —"His genius is almost the only instance of a high order of thought becoming popular; not that the people do not prize literary worth, but because they are unable to comprehend obscure poetry. Bryant's pieces seem to be fragments of one and the same poem, and require only a common plot to constitute a unique epic."

Bryant spoke with admiration and reverence of Wordsworth; and, afterwards, frequently mentioned with pleasure, the courteous and kindly manner in which he was received by him when he visited the Lake country. The grandeur and solemnity of Wordsworth had stirred his soul with sympathy, but he resembled him, chiefly, in the meditative character of his genius. Of Bryant it has been said, that, like Goldsmith, "he made use of few words, restricting himself to the simpler phrases of our tongue." He certainly possessed the triple gift of Athené, "self-reverence, self-knowledge, and self-control."

Bryant has given us glimpses of his theory of poetry, in the preface to the *Library of Poetry and Song*, which he edited, telling us—that poetry ought to fill the mind with delightful images, and awaken the gentler

emotions; that the varieties of poetic excellence are as great as the varieties of beauty in flowers, or in the female face, or in the vari-coloured tints of twin-stars; that only poems of moderate length, or portions of greater poems, produce the poetical effect—this because poetry awakens emotions which are necessarily of limited duration, and in long poems, even of the highest order, we chiefly dwell on the noble passages; that poetry should be free from "far-fetched conceits, ideas oddly brought together, and quaint turns of thought," in short, that poetry should be simple, so as not to tax the attention by artificial or involved expressions, but leave feeling to flow on freely and spontaneously; that the materials of poetry are found in the permanent surroundings of life, and in natural objects. To quote his own words:—

"The elements of poetry lie in natural objects, in the vicissitudes of life, in the emotions of the human heart, and the relations of man and man. He who can present them in combinations and lights which at once affect the mind with a deep sense of their truth and beauty is the poet for his own age and the ages that succeed it. It is no disparagement to either his skill or his power that he finds them near at hand: the nearer they lie to the common track of the human intelligence, the more certain is he of the sympathy of his own generation, and of those which shall come after him."

He also believed that poetry came within the laws of ethics, and was, consequently, subject to moral restrictions. Such were some of the canons of Bryant's art; but he was careful not to limit them; always, however, regarding poetry as a high calling and a sacred trust. He chose to deal with the eternal, rather than the transient; and, in one of his later poems, he has given us both the key to his theory, and, at the same time, a beautiful example of his art:—

THE POET.

Thou, who wouldst wear the name
  Of poet mid thy brethren of mankind,
And clothe in words of flame
  Thoughts that shall live within the general mind!
Deem not the framing of a deathless lay
The pastime of a drowsy summer day.

But gather all thy powers,
  And wreak them on the verse that thou dost weave,
And in thy lonely hours,
  At silent morning or at wakeful eve,
While the warm current tingles through thy veins,
Set forth the burning words in fluent strains.

No smooth array of phrase,
  Artfully sought and ordered though it be,
Which the cold rhymer lays
  Upon his page with languid industry,
Can wake the listless pulse to livelier speed,
Or fill with sudden tears the eyes that read.

The secret wouldst thou know
  To touch the heart or fire the blood at will?
Let thine own eyes o'erflow;
  Let thy lips quiver with the passionate thrill;
Seize the great thought, ere yet its power be past,
And bind, in words, the fleet emotion fast.

Then, should thy verse appear
  Halting and harsh, and all unaptly wrought,
Touch the crude line with fear,
  Save in the moment of impassioned thought;
Then summon back the original glow, and mend
The strain with rapture that with fire was penned.

Yet let no empty gust
  Of passion find an utterance in thy lay,
A blast that whirls the dust
  Along the howling street and dies away;

But feelings of calm power and mighty sweep,
Like currents journeying through the windless deep.

Seek'st thou, in living lays,
To limn the beauty of the earth and sky?
Before thine inner gaze
Let all that beauty in clear vision lie;
Look on it with exceeding love, and write
The words inspired by wonder and delight.

Of tempests wouldst thou sing,
Or tell of battles—make thyself a part
Of the great tumult; cling
To the tossed wreck with terror in thy heart;
Scale, with the assaulting host, the rampart's height,
And strike and struggle in the thickest fight.

So shalt thou frame a lay
That haply may endure from age to age,
And they who read shall say:
"What witchery hangs upon this poet's page!
What art is his the written spells to find
That sway from mood to mood the willing mind!"

Stedman, after remarking on Bryant's perfect mastery over the few simple rhythmic measures in which he elected to write, goes on to say:—"The finest and most sustained of his poems of nature are those written in blank verse. At intervals, so rare throughout his life as to resemble the seven-year harvests, or the occasional wave that overtops the rest, he composed a series of those pieces which now form a unique panorama of nature's aspects, moving to the music of lofty thoughts and melodious words. . . . Like the bards of old, his spirit delights in fire, air, earth, and water,—the apparent structures of the starry heavens, the mountain recesses, and the vasty deep. These he apostrophizes, but, over them and within them, he discerns and bows the knee to the

omniscience of a protecting Father, a creative God. Poets, eminent in this wise, have been gifted always with *imagination*. . . . He seldom touched the keys, yet they gave out an organ tone. . . . As he grew older, beyond the asperities of life, he became less brooding, sad, and grave. His fancy, what there was of it, came in his later years, and suggested two of his longest pieces, 'Sella' and 'The Little Children of the Snow' tales of folk-lore, in which his lighter and more graceful handling of blank-verse may be studied with pleasure."

Dr. Ray Palmer, specially referring to Bryant, with fine critical acumen, has thus pointed out the qualities which render poetry enduring:—"Poems, however intellectually splendid in conception and brilliant in their finish, that are not in chime with the deeper experiences of humanity, and do not touch the richest chords of sympathy, or that embody the corrupting and the false, however charmingly wrought up, will not be permanently read and praised. On the other hand, the poet that is true to external nature, to the nature of man, to the reality of things past, present, and future so far as that is open to the seer —whose aim and the tendency of whose writings are to elevate and refine, to quicken and to urge towards the best possibilities, is the poet who will be least affected by the ever-changing caprices of the day, and will most deeply root, and most enduringly maintain himself, in the affections and memories of mankind. His reputation will rest on no mere critical opinions, nor anything factitious, but on what is most fixed in the constitution of the human soul and in the truth of things, and therefore will abide.

"Mr. Bryant is a poet of this class, and his place in the literature of his country and the world has long since been determined. At home and abroad alike, the

position assigned him is in the front rank of the poets of his time. Yet he has never been the poet of the million. He is a poet of his own order; an order requiring a certain refinement and culture in his readers for the true appreciation of it, and therefore subject to some limitations. . . .

"Endowed with a nature singularly tender and receptive, and an intellect clear and keen in its perceptions, he has presented to his readers a transcript of what he himself has seen and felt—of what is richest, purest, highest, in his own inward life—a life of marked characteristics and diversified experience. To such an extent is this true, that the number of his pieces not bearing distinctly the impress of his own personality is very small indeed.

"A calm and meditative temperament, a delicate sensibility, a rich but chaste imagination, a profoundly serious thoughtfulness in the presence of the mysteries of nature and of human existence, a settled faith in God and his providence, in the immortality of man and the truth of the Christian religion—these are the leading characteristics of the man, as revealed in the general tenor of his poetry."

How carefully accurate and brilliant are the pictures of nature Bryant gives us! Witness the following lines, descriptive of trees, from "A Winter Piece:"—

"Come when the rains
Have glazed the snow and clothed the trees with ice,
While the slant sun of February pours
Into the bowers a flood of light. Approach!
The incrusted surface shall upbear thy steps,
And the broad arching portals of the grove
Welcome thy entering. Look! the massy trunks
Are cased in the pure crystal; each light spray,

Nodding and tinkling in the breath of heaven,
Is studded with its trembling water-drops,
That glimmer with an amethystine light.
But round the parent-stem the long low boughs
Bend, in a glittering ring, and arbours hide
The glassy floor. Oh! you might deem the spot
The spacious cavern of some virgin mine,
Deep in the womb of earth—where the gems grow,
And diamonds put forth radiant rods and bud
With amethyst and topaz—and the place
Lit up, most royally, with the pure beam
That dwells in them. Or, haply, the vast hall
Of fairy palace, that outlasts the night,
And fades not in the glory of the sun;—
Where crystal columns send forth slender shafts
And crossing arches; and fantastic aisles
Wind from the sight in brightness, and are lost
Among the crowded pillars. Raise thine eye;
Thou seest no cavern roof, no palace vault;
There the blue sky and the white drifting cloud
Look in. Again the wildered fancy dreams
Of spouting fountains, frozen as they rose,
And fixed, with all their branching jets, in air,
And all their sluices sealed. All, all is light;
Light without shade. But all shall pass away
With the next sun. From numberless vast trunks
Loosened, the crashing ice shall make a sound
Like the far roar of rivers, and the eve
Shall close o'er the brown woods as it was wont."

Or the "Summer Wind," the whole of which is very perfect of its kind:—

SUMMER WIND.

It is a sultry day; the sun has drunk
The dew that lay upon the morning grass;
There is no rustling in the lofty elm
That canopies my dwelling, and its shade

Scarce cools me. All is silent, save the faint
And interrupted murmur of the bee,
Settling on the sick flowers, and then again
Instantly on the wing. The plants around
Feel the too potent fervours: the tall maize
Rolls up its long green leaves; the clover droops
Its tender foliage, and declines its blooms.
But far in the fierce sunshine tower the hills,
With all their growth of woods, silent and stern,
As if the scorching heat and dazzling light
Were but an element they loved. Bright clouds,
Motionless pillars of the brazen heaven—
Their bases on the mountains—their white tops
Shining in the far ether—fire the air
With a reflected radiance, and make turn
The gazer's eye away. For me, I lie
Languidly in the shade, where the thick turf,
Yet virgin from the kisses of the sun,
Retains some freshness, and I woo the wind
That still delays his coming. Why so slow,
Gentle and voluble spirit of the air?
Oh, come and breathe upon the fainting earth
Coolness and life. Is it that in his caves
He hears me? See, on yonder woody ridge,
The pine is bending his proud top, and now
Among the nearer groves, chestnut and oak
Are tossing their green boughs about. He comes;
Lo, where the grassy meadow runs in waves!
The deep distressful silence of the scene
Breaks up with mingling of unnumbered sounds
And universal motion. He is come,
Shaking a shower of blossoms from the shrubs,
And bearing on their fragrance; and he brings
Music of birds, and rustling of young boughs,
And sound of swaying branches, and the voice
Of distant waterfalls. All the green herbs
Are stirring in his breath; a thousand flowers,
By the road-side and the borders of the brook,

Nod gayly to each other; glossy leaves
Are twinkling in the sun, as if the dew
Were on them yet, and silver waters break
Into small waves and sparkle as he comes.

There is a sweet, dainty, Elizabethan air about the following "Song," in which he quaintly recommends each of the four seasons as adapted for wooing:—

SONG.

Dost thou idly ask to hear
At what gentle seasons
Nymphs relent, when lovers near
Press the tenderest reasons?
Ah, they give their faith too oft
To the careless wooer;
Maidens' hearts are always soft:
Would that men's were truer!

Woo the fair one when around
Early birds are singing;
When, o'er all the fragrant ground,
Early herbs are springing:
When the brookside, bank, and grove,
All with blossoms laden,
Shine with beauty, breathe of love,—
Woo the timid maiden.

Woo her when, with rosy blush,
Summer eve is sinking;
When, on rills that softly gush,
Stars are softly winking;
When through boughs that knit the bower
Moonlight gleams are stealing
Woo her, till the gentle hour
Wake a gentler feeling.

Woo her, when autumnal dyes
Tinge the woody mountain;

When the drooping foliage lies
In the weedy fountain;
Let the scene that tells how fast
Youth is passing over,
Warn her, ere her bloom is past,
To secure her lover.

Woo her when the north winds call
At the lattice nightly;
When, within the cheerful hall,
Blaze the fagots brightly;
While the wintry tempest round
Sweeps the landscape hoary,
Sweeter in her ear shall sound
Love's delightful story.

The poem which follows is bold, striking, and only too true an illustration of the sad fact, that

"Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn!"

for, alas! the tender mercies of the wicked are always cruel:—

THE AFRICAN CHIEF.

Chained in the market-place he stood,
A man of giant frame,
Amid the gathering multitude
That shrunk to hear his name—
All stern of look and strong of limb,
His dark eye on the ground:—
And silently they gazed on him,
As on a lion bound.

Vainly, but well, that chief had fought,
He was a captive now,
Yet pride, that fortune humbles not,
Was written on his brow.
The scars his dark broad bosom wore
Showed warrior true and brave;

A prince among his tribe before,
He could not be a slave.

Then to his conqueror he spake:
"My brother is a king;
Undo this necklace from my neck,
And take this bracelet ring,
And send me where my brother reigns,
And I will fill thy hands
With store of ivory from the plains,
And gold-dust from the sands."

"Not for thy ivory nor thy gold
Will I unbind thy chain;
That bloody hand shall never hold
The battle-spear again.
A price thy nation never gave
Shall yet be paid for thee;
For thou shalt be the Christian's slave,
In lands beyond the sea."

Then wept the warrior chief, and bade
To shred his locks away;
And one by one, each heavy braid
Before the victor lay.
Thick were the platted locks, and long,
And closely hidden there
Shone many a wedge of gold among
The dark and crispèd hair.

"Look, feast thy greedy eye with gold
Long kept for sorest need:
Take it—thou askest sums untold—
And say that I am freed.
Take it—my wife, the long, long day,
Weeps by the cocoa-tree,
And my young children leave their play,
And ask in vain for me."

"I take thy gold, but I have made
Thy fetters fast and strong,

And ween that by the cocoa-shade
Thy wife will wait thee long."
Strong was the agony that shook
The captive's frame to hear,
And the proud meaning of his look
Was changed to mortal fear.

His heart was broken—crazed his brain:
At once his eye grew wild;
He struggled fiercely with his chain,
Whispered, and wept, and smiled;
Yet wore not long those fatal bands,
And once, at shut of day,
They drew him forth upon the sands
The foul hyena's prey.

What cheerful brightness there is in

THE GLADNESS OF NATURE!

Is this a time to be cloudy and sad,
When our mother Nature laughs around;
When even the deep blue heavens look glad,
And gladness breathes from the blossoming ground?

There are notes of joy from the hang-bird and wren,
And the gossip of swallows through all the sky;
The ground-squirrel gaily chirps by his den,
And the wilding bee hums merrily by.

The clouds are at play in the azure space,
And their shadows at play on the bright-green vale,
And here they stretch to the frolic chase,
And there they roll on the easy gale.

There's a dance of leaves in that aspen bower,
There's a titter of winds in that beechen tree,
There's a smile on the fruit, and a smile on the flower.
And a laugh from the brook that runs to the sea.

And look at the broad-faced sun, how he smiles
On the dewy earth that smiles in his ray,

On the leaping waters and gay young isles;
Ay, look, and he'll smile thy gloom away.

How natural is his longing, in the "Summer Ramble!"—

"Away! I will not be, to-day,
The only slave of toil and care,
Away from desk and dust! away!
I'll be as idle as the air.

Beneath the open sky abroad,
Among the plants and breathing things,
The sinless, peaceful works of God,
I'll share the calm the season brings."

Speaking of Bryant's poem entitled "The Past," Stoddard says:—"There is a depth, a grandeur, a solemnity in this poem which Bryant had not before attained, and an imaginative presentation of things intangible, which the strong art of the poet summons before us, we know not how. He contrives to re-people

"'The dark backward and abysm of time'

with awful, and sorrowful, and beautiful shapes and shadows."

We quote the last three verses, which are full of hopeful longing, tenderness, and beauty:—

"They have not perished—no!
Kind words, remembered voices once so sweet,
Smiles, radiant long ago,
And features, the great soul's apparent seat.

All shall come back; each tie
Of pure affection shall be knit again;
Alone shall Evil die,
And Sorrow dwell a prisoner in thy reign.

And then shall I behold
Him, by whose kind paternal side I sprung,

And her, who, still and cold,
Fills the next grave—the beautiful and young."

"The Evening Wind," picturesque and melodious, is full of sweet humanity. "He sees the regions of land and sea, that the wind has blown over on its journey to his lattice. He knows that it is a delight to others as well as to himself; to the higher forms of nature as well as to mankind; that it rocks the little bird in his nest, curls the still waters, summons the forest harmonies from innumerable boughs, and takes its pleasant way over the closing flowers. The old man leans his silver head to feel it; it kisses the sleeping child, and dries the moistened curls on his temples; and those who watch by the sick man's bed part his curtains to allow it to cool his burning brow. This large, far-reaching sympathy with his fellow-creatures is a marked characteristic of Bryant's poetry, and distinguishes it," says Stoddard justly, "from that of every other American poet, living or dead."

THE EVENING WIND.

Spirit that breathest through my lattice, thou
  That cool'st the twilight of the sultry day,
Gratefully flows thy freshness round my brow;
  Thou hast been out upon the deep at play,
Riding all day the wild blue waves till now,
  Roughening their crests, and scattering high their spray,
And swelling the white sail. I welcome thee
To the scorched land, thou wanderer of the sea!

Nor I alone; a thousand bosoms round
  Inhale thee in the fulness of delight;
And languid forms rise up, and pulses bound
  Livelier, at coming of the wind of night;
And, languishing to hear thy grateful sound,
  Lies the vast inland stretched beyond the sight.

Go forth into the gathering shade; go forth,
God's blessing breathed upon the fainting earth!

Go, rock the little wood-bird in his nest,
Curl the still waters, bright with stars, and rouse
The wide old wood from his majestic rest,
Summoning from the innumerable boughs
The strange, deep harmonies that haunt his breast:
Pleasant shall be thy way where meekly bows
The shutting flower, and darkling waters pass,
And where the o'ershadowing branches sweep the grass.

The faint old man shall lean his silver head
To feel thee; thou shalt kiss the child asleep,
And dry the moistened curls that overspread
His temples, while his breathing grows more deep:
And they who stand about the sick man's bed,
Shall joy to listen to thy distant sweep,
And softly part his curtains to allow
Thy visit, grateful to his burning brow.

Go—but the circle of eternal change,
Which is the life of Nature, shall restore,
With sounds and scents from all thy mighty range,
Thee to thy birthplace of the deep once more;
Sweet odours in the sea-air, sweet and strange,
Shall tell the home-sick mariner of the shore;
And, listening to thy murmur, he shall deem
He hears the rustling leaf and running stream.

Here we present two more examples of these simple yet exquisite delineations of Nature, illumined with living light from the poet's own soul:—

"INNOCENT CHILD AND SNOW-WHITE FLOWER."

Innocent child and snow-white flower!
Well are ye paired in your opening hour.
Thus should the pure and the lovely meet,
Stainless with stainless, and sweet with sweet.

White as those leaves, just blown apart,
Are the folds of thy own young heart,
Guilty passion and cankering care
Never have left their traces there.

Artless one! though thou gazest now
O'er the white blossom with earnest brow,
Soon will it tire thy childish eye;
Fair as it is, thou wilt throw it by.

Throw it aside in thy weary hour,
Throw to the ground the fair white flower;
Yet, as thy tender years depart,
Keep that white and innocent heart.

TO THE FRINGED GENTIAN.

Thou blossom bright with autumn dew,
And coloured with the heaven's own blue,
That openest when the quiet light
Succeeds the keen and frosty night.

Thou comest not when violets lean
O'er wandering brooks and springs unseen.
Or columbines, in purple dressed,
Nod o'er the ground-bird's hidden nest.

Thou waitest late and com'st alone,
When woods are bare and birds are flown,
And frosts and shortening days portend
The aged year is near his end.

Then doth thy sweet and quiet eye
Look through its fringes to the sky,
Blue—blue—as if that sky let fall
A flower from its cerulean wall.

I would that thus, when I shall see
The hour of death draw near to me,
Hope, blossoming within my heart,
May look to heaven as I depart.

Bryant was a scholar, and a student of other literatures than his own. He executed numerous translations from the Greek, Latin, Spanish, German, and Portuguese. Those from the Spanish, Longfellow, long ago, praised as rivalling the originals in beauty. Of his Homeric translations, belonging to a later date, we shall afterwards speak. Meanwhile, here, we append three specimens of his short translations:—

THE LIFE OF THE BLESSED.

FROM THE SPANISH OF LUIS PONCE DE LEON.

Region of life and light!
Land of the good whose earthly toils are o'er!
Nor frost nor heat may blight
Thy vernal beauty, fertile shore,
Yielding thy blessed fruits for evermore.

There, without crook or sling,
Walks the good shepherd; blossoms white and red
Round his meek temples cling;
And to sweet pastures led,
The flock he loves, beneath his eye is fed

He guides, and near him they
Follow delighted, for he makes them go
Where dwells eternal May,
And heavenly roses blow,
Deathless, and gathered but again to grow.

He leads them to the height
Named of the infinite and long-sought Good,
And fountains of delight;
And where his feet have stood
Springs up, along the way, their tender food.

And when, in the mid skies,
The climbing sun has reached his highest bound,
Reposing as he lies,

With all his flock around,
He witches the still air with numerous sound.

From his sweet lute flow forth
Immortal harmonies, of power to still
All passions born of earth,
And draw the ardent will
Its destiny of goodness to fulfil.

Might but a little part,
A wandering breath of that high melody,
Descend into my heart,
And change it till it be
Transformed and swallowed up, oh love, in thee!

Ah! then my soul should know,
Beloved! where thou liest at noon of day,
And from this place of woe
Released, should take its way
To mingle with thy flock and never stray.

LOVE IN THE AGE OF CHIVALRY.

FROM PEYRE VIDAL, THE TROUBADOUR.

The earth was sown with early flowers,
The heavens were blue and bright—
I met a youthful cavalier
As lovely as the light.
I knew him not—but in my heart
His graceful image lies,
And well I marked his open brow,
His sweet and tender eyes,
His ruddy lips that ever smiled,
His glittering teeth betwixt,
And flowing robe embroidered o'er,
With leaves and blossoms mixed.
He wore a chaplet of the rose;
His palfrey, white and sleek,

Was marked with many an ebon spot,
And many a purple streak;
Of jasper was his saddle-bow,
His housings sapphire stone,
And brightly in his stirrup glanced
The purple calcedon.
Fast rode the gallant cavalier,
As youthful horsemen ride;
"Peyre Vidal! know that I am Love,"
The blooming stranger cried;
"And this is Mercy by my side,
A dame of high degree;
This maid is Chastity," he said,
"This squire is Loyalty."

THE LOVE OF GOD.

FROM THE PROVENCAL OF BERNARD RASCAS.

All things that are on earth shall wholly pass away,
Except the love of God, which shall live and last for aye.
The forms of men shall be as they had never been;
The blasted groves shall lose their fresh and tender green;
The birds of the thicket shall end their pleasant song,
And the nightingale shall cease to chant the evening long;
The kine of the pasture shall feel the dart that kills,
And all the fair white flocks shall perish from the hills.
The goat and antlered stag, the wolf and the fox,
The wild-boar of the wood, and the chamois of the rocks,
And the strong and fearless bear, in the trodden dust shall lie;
And the dolphin of the sea, and the mighty whale, shall die.
And realms shall be dissolved, and empires be no more,
And they shall bow to death, who ruled from shore to shore;
And the great globe itself, so the holy writings tell,
With the rolling firmament, where the starry armies dwell,
Shall melt with fervent heat—they shall all pass away,
Except the love of God, which shall live and last for aye.

CHAPTER IX.

1834–1857: Bryant's First Four Visits to the Old World, and his Travels in America — Delivers Addresses on Cole and Cooper—Cedarmere and his Home-life.

Visits Europe in 1834—Alpine Snow-storm—Returns Home in 1836—The Prairies—The Fountain—The Future Life—Visit to the Southern States and New England—The White-footed Deer—Purchases an Estate on Long Island—In 1845 sees England for the First Time—Meets Samuel Rogers—Suggests Central Park—The Scottish Highlands—On his Return Improves Cedarmere—A Poet's Home—Poe's Sketch of Bryant—Illustrated Edition of his Poems—American Travels—Cole the Artist—Visits Southern States and Cuba in 1849—Tropical Vegetation—Cuban Mode of Burial—Visit to Europe—Switzerland—Returns Home—Visit to Cuba, Europe, and the Holy Land in 1854—New Edition of his Poems—Happy Home-life.

In the summer of 1834, Bryant, feeling that he needed relaxation, and that he was now able to arrange for getting it, left the management of the *Evening Post* in the hands of Leggett, his assistant, and sailed for Havre with his wife and family. On reaching the Old World, the air of antiquity and the mediæval aspect of churches, public buildings, and mansions, greatly impressed him, as it generally does educated Americans, who, for the first time, actually see what has been long familiar to their minds through books.

He reached Paris in August, and, after spending a few weeks there, he set out for Florence. His journey from the French capital to Chalons-on-the-Saône, is thus described:—

"Monotonous plains, covered with vineyards and wheat-fields, with very few trees, and those spoiled by being lopped for fuel; sunburnt women, driving carts, or at work in the fields; gloomy, cheerless-looking towns, with narrow, filthy streets; troops of beggars surrounding your carriage whenever you stop, or whenever the nature of the roads obliges the horses to walk, and chanting their request in the most doleful

whine imaginable—such are the sights and sounds that meet you for the greater part of two hundred and fifty miles. There are, however, some exceptions as to the aspect of the country. Auton, one of the most ancient towns in France, and yet retaining some remains of Roman architecture, lies in a beautiful and picturesque region. A little beyond that town we ascended a hill by a road winding along a glen, the rocky sides of which were clothed with an unpruned wood; and a clear stream ran dashing over the stones, now on one side of the road, and then on the other—the first instance of a brook left to follow its natural channel which I had seen in France. Two young Frenchmen, who were our fellow-passengers, were wild with delight at this glimpse of unspoiled nature. They followed the meanderings of the stream, leaping from rock to rock, and shouting till the woods rang again."

In Florence, his windows overlooked the Bridge of the Arno, commanding a view of the magnificent landscape. Thoroughly appreciating the new features of the scenery, he nevertheless maintained his constant habit of independent and accurate observation:—"There is a great deal of prattle," he says, "about Italian skies. The skies and clouds of Italy, so far as I have had an opportunity of judging, do not present so great a variety of beautiful appearances as our own; but the Italian atmosphere is far more uniformly fine than ours." This accuracy gives a freshness and power to his descriptions, whether in poetry or prose, at home or abroad:—"He is original," says Emerson, "because he is sincere—a true painter of the face of this country, and of the sentiment of his own people. It is his proper praise, that he first, and he only, made known to mankind our northern landscape—its summer splendour, its autumn russet, its winter lights and glooms."

From Florence he proceeded to Pisa, visited Volterra, sojourned in Rome and Naples, saw Venice, and then

journeyed northward through the Tyrol. The following is his account of a June snow-storm in the Alps:—

"As we advanced," he says, "the clouds began to roll off from the landscape, disclosing here and there, through openings in their broad skirts as they swept along, glimpses of the profound valleys below us, and of the white sides and summits of mountains in the mid-sky above. At length the sun appeared, and revealed a prospect of such wildness, grandeur, and splendour, as I had never before seen. Lofty peaks of the most fantastic shapes, with deep clefts between, sharp needles of rock, and overhanging crags, infinite in multitude, shot up everywhere around us, glistening in the new-fallen snow, with their wreaths of mist creeping along their sides. At intervals, swollen torrents, looking at a distance like long trains of foam, came thundering down the mountains, and, crossing the road, plunged into the verdant valleys which winded beneath. Beside the highway were fields of young grain, pressed to the ground with the snow; and, in the meadows, ranunculuses of the size of roses, large yellow violets, and a thousand other Alpine flowers of the most brilliant hues, were peeping through their white covering. We stopped to breakfast at a place called Landro, a solitary inn, in the midst of this grand scenery, with a little chapel beside it. The water from the dissolving snow was dripping merrily from the roof in a bright June sun."

Descending into the valleys of the Tyrol, he proceeded to visit Innsbruck and Munich,[1] where he remained for some time.

[1] Those who wish information regarding Munich, the art capital of Bavaria, and the great works of Kaulbach to be seen there, ought to read *The Art Student in Munich*, by Mrs. Alfred A. Watts, the eldest daughter of Wm. and Mary Howitt. Of this admirable and delightful work, we are glad to see that a new edition, with additional chapters, has just been issued by Messrs. Thomas De La Rue & Co., in two volumes. Besides being serviceable as a high-class and picturesque guide-book to the scenery, art, and life around her, much, that is personally very interesting, is told us about Kaulbach, the great master under whom she studied, "with his unbounded imagination, philosophic thought, and studious research." The whole work, written in good terse racy English, is a valuable and permanent addition to the art literature of the world.—A. J. S.

Bryant had intended to remain in Munich for a longer period, and to spend several years in Europe, both for the education of his children, and with a view to his own improvement in the study of modern languages; but, intelligence reaching him, that Leggett, his editorial assistant, was ill, he required at once to hasten homewards, and he arrived in New York in 1836, after an absence of nearly two years.

Although Leggett's illness had not occurred, Bryant did not return any too soon, for he found that the *Post*, through Leggett's rashness and want of tact in carrying out what he properly deemed improvements, had got somewhat into disfavour with many of its supporters. However, by dint of his wonted prudence and diligence, Bryant soon re-established confidence, and restored the paper to its former prosperous and influential position.

From 1836 to 1845 he was at home, and hard at work. In 1841 Bryant visited the prairies of Illinois, "then the abode of prairie-wolves and rough settlers, with whom lynch-law was a necessary safeguard to the honest portion of the community." His experiences were recorded in the *Post;* and he has also vividly pictured the prairies —"these gardens of the desert"—in several of his poems. This year, he collected the letters which, from time to time, he had sent to the *Post*, and published them under the title of "Letters of a Traveller from Europe."

In 1842 a volume, called *The Fountain, and other Poems*, appeared. It contained, amongst others, "The Winds," "The Green Mountain Boys," "The Death of Schiller," "Life," "A Presentiment," "The Future Life," and "An Evening Reverie"—the poems of seventeen years.

The most remarkable of these is the "The Future Life," written to his wife about twenty years after his marriage, and which calmly, tenderly, and exquisitely

sets forth the depth and beauty of their mutual affection. Every line that he ever wrote was sincere, and, in the seventh verse, the self-restraint which he habitually exercised, and which was at times apt to be mistaken for coolness of temperament, is incidentally revealed.

THE FUTURE LIFE.

How shall I know thee in the sphere which keeps
The disembodied spirits of the dead,
When all of thee that time could wither sleeps
And perishes among the dust we tread?

For I shall feel the sting of ceaseless pain
If there I meet thy gentle presence not;
Nor hear the voice I love, nor read again
In thy serenest eyes the tender thought.

Will not thy own meek heart demand me there?
That heart whose fondest throbs to me were given—
My name on earth was ever in thy prayer,
And wilt thou never utter it in heaven?

In meadows fanned by heaven's life-breathing wind,
In the resplendence of that glorious sphere,
And larger movements of the unfettered mind,
Wilt thou forget the love that joined us here?

The love that lived through all the stormy past,
And meekly with my harsher nature bore,
And deeper grew, and tenderer to the last,
Shall it expire with life and be no more?

A happier lot than mine, and larger light,
Await thee there, for thou hast bowed thy will
In cheerful homage to the rule of right,
And lovest all, and renderest good for ill.

For me, the sordid cares in which I dwell
Shrink and consume my heart, as heat the scroll;
And wrath has left its scar—that fire of hell
Has left its frightful scar upon my soul.

Yet, though thou wear'st the glory of the sky,
Wilt thou not keep the same beloved name,
The same fair thoughtful brow, and gentle eye,
Lovelier in heaven's sweet climate, yet the same?

Shalt thou not teach me, in that calmer home,
The wisdom that I learned so ill in this—
The wisdom which is love—till I become
Thy fit companion in that land of bliss?

In the spring of 1843, he made a journey through the Southern States, visiting Washington, Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, and St. Augustine. The country and people were described in letters to the *Post*. On his return, he visited New England, and noted down his experiences, as was his wont, and these were also subsequently given in *Letters of a Traveller*.

In 1844 he published another volume, under the title of *The White-footed Deer, and other Poems*, opening with a simple ballad tale.

In 1845, before setting out for Europe, Bryant purchased an estate on Long Island, the mansion on it, dating from 1787, contained many large old-fashioned rooms. It was finely situated on the top of the hills, surrounded by old trees, green fields, and streams, and commanding a magnificent view of the bay. The poet saw its fine capabilities, and resolved to repair the house and improve the grounds, which he afterwards did.

The *Evening Post* was now in so prosperous a condition, that Bryant felt he might safely venture to leave it for a time in the care of others, and again visit Europe. So in 1845 he set sail for Liverpool, now seeing England for the first time. On reaching London a breakfast was given in his honour by Edward Everett, who was then the American minister at St. James'; and among those present were Samuel Rogers, Moore, and Kenyon.

Rogers and Bryant took to each other, from the first, and became friends. At a breakfast in Rogers' house, Bryant subsequently met Eastlake, Monkton Milnes (now Lord Houghton), Poole, the author of *Paul Pry*, and other celebrities.

As a matter of course, Bryant visited the Royal Academy Exhibition, and other art collections of the Metropolis.

A letter which he, at this time, wrote from London to the *Post*, after visiting the parks, was the means of originating Central Park in New York. From it we quote the following paragraph addressed to the inhabitants of New York:—

"The population of your city, increasing with such prodigious rapidity, your sultry summers, and the corrupt atmosphere generated in hot and crowded streets, make it a cause of regret, that, in laying out New York, no preparation was made, while it was yet practicable, for a range of parks and public gardens along the central part of the island or elsewhere, to remain perpetually for the refreshment and recreation of the citizens during the torrid heats of the warm season. There are yet unoccupied lands on the island which might, I suppose, be procured for the purpose, and which, on account of their rocky and uneven surface, might be laid out into surpassingly beautiful pleasure-grounds; but, while we are discussing the subject, the advancing population of the city is sweeping over them, and covering them from our reach."

Bryant then visited Edinburgh, which he considered the finest city he had ever seen, Stirling, Bannockburn, and Falkirk, and made a tour through the Highlands, paying special attention to the scenes of Scott's *Lady of the Lake.*

From Glasgow, he went to the Land of Burns. Then, after seeing Belfast and Dublin, he proceeded to the

Continent, travelling through France, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, and Italy.

At the end of the year (1845) he returned home to New York, and at once set about the improvement of his lately purchased country house on Long Island, near Roslyn, and now known as Cedarmere. He removed the heavy porticoes and pillars of the old square house, and replaced them with light lattice work for training vines and other climbing plants upon, threw out bay windows on both sides of the mansion, added some picturesque and irregular out-buildings, and began to plant fruit-trees and shrubbery. This old house situated on the hills, embosomed in venerable trees and greenery, surrounded with shrubs and flowers, and commanding beautiful views, with picturesque reaches of land and water, he converted into the very ideal of a poet's home. Professor Hill speaks of it thus: "Though sheltered by the hills on the north, the windows of the mansion command a noble landscape, in which green fields, the bright waters of the bay, and the sails of the vessels on its bosom, blend in a picture of surpassing loveliness. A broad green lawn below the house rims 'the little lake,' that flows into a stream between banks of flowering shrubs and tangled evergreens. The waters turn a little mill, housed in what seems to be a Swiss cottage overrun with vines, till the music of its machinery corrects the illusion of the eye through the perception of the ear. In the garden a small conservatory protects the blooming exotics during the cold season of the year, and numerous hot-beds assist the tender plants in spring. On the slope beyond the garden stands a

> 'lofty group
> Of ancient pear-trees, that with spring-time burst
> Into such breadth of bloom,'

beneath whose branches the poet enjoyed his "annual festival of bees,' and 'songs of birds within their leafy screen.' Here is the swing for the little people of the neighbourhood; and every year, when the season of fruitage came, the poet would sit and hear

> 'shouts
> Of joy from the children gathering up the fruit
> Shaken in August from the willing boughs.'

"On the hill above the mansion are apple-trees planted by the poet's own hand, with sombre evergreens and stately maples. From among these trees, celebrated in the poet's verses, we look away over the wooded hills far out on the waters of the bay, dotted with white sails, and ploughed by the majestic steamers that move like vast swans upon its surface, till the clouds and the low hills beyond limit our vision with a dim horizon."

Of a visit, paid to his friend the poet, General James Grant Wilson writes:—"Cedarmere is an extensive estate, and rich in a great variety of trees. As I was walking on a sunny October afternoon with the poet through his loved domain, he pointed out a Spanish chestnut-tree laden with fruit, and, springing lithely on a fence despite his seventy-six summers, caught an open burr hanging from one of the lower branches, opened it, and, jumping down with the agility of a youth, handed to his city guest the contents, consisting of two as large chestnuts as I ever saw in Spain. The Madeira and Pecan nuts were also successfully cultivated by him at Cedarmere. During another walk, Mr. Bryant gave a jump and caught the branch of a tree with his hands, and, after swinging backward and forward several times with his feet raised, he swung himself over a fence without touching it."

And Curtis, in his *Homes of American Authors*, says:—

"So we willingly follow Mr. Bryant to Roslyn; see him musing on the pretty rural bridge that spans the fish-pond, or taking the oar in his daughter's fairy boat, or pruning trees, or talking over farm matters with his neighbours, or . . . sitting calm and happy in his pleasant library, surrounded by the friends he loves to draw around him, or listening to the prattle of infant voices, quite as much at home there as under their own more especial roof,—his daughter's,—within the same inclosure."

The rooms were filled with objects of interest which he had brought from many lands. On the walls hung choice paintings and engravings; while his library was select. Bryant, General James Grant Wilson informs us, "alternated recreations of tree-planting and pruning and other rural occupations with his literary labour. Not extensive, but excellent in wide and judicious selections, was his library of several thousand volumes. The poet's knowledge of ancient and living languages enabled him to add with advantage to his collection of books the works of the best French, German, Italian, and Spanish authors."

At Cedarmere, he kept his most valuable books; there he continued to write his poems, and thither travellers, statesmen, and distinguished men resorted "to pay their respects to the sage, philosopher, and author. They were always welcomed, and enjoyed the purity of taste and simplicity of manner which presided over the mansion."

Shortly after Bryant's return from Europe, Edgar Allen Poe, who was then writing articles on The Literati of New York, gave the world the following pen-and-ink sketch of Bryant:—

"He is now fifty-two years of age. In height he is, perhaps, five feet nine. His frame is rather robust. His features are large, but thin. His countenance is sallow, nearly bloodless.

His eyes are piercing gray, deep set, with large projecting eyebrows. His mouth is wide and massive; the expression of the smile hard, cold, even sardonic. The forehead is broad, with prominent organs of ideality; a good deal bald; the hair thin and grayish; as are also the whiskers, which he wears in a simple style. His bearing is quite distinguished, full of the aristocracy of intellect. In general, he looks in better health than before his last visit to England. He seems active—physically and morally energetic. His dress is plain to the extreme of simplicity, although of late there is a certain degree of Anglicism about it.

"In character no man stands more lofty than Bryant. The peculiarly melancholy expression of his countenance has caused him to be accused of harshness, or coldness of heart. Never was there a greater mistake. His soul is charity itself, in all respects generous and noble. His manners are undoubtedly reserved."

In 1846 his collected poems were printed at Philadelphia in a handsome edition, illustrated by Leutze.

His foreign travels made him desirous to see more of his own country, and he took many excursions in the United States during the next three years, some of them occupying several months. The usual letters in the *Post*, giving the result of his observation, are dated from the great lakes of the north-west, the towns of Pennsylvania, the forests of Maine, and the mountains of New Hampshire.

"They tell of days when the lumbering stage-coach was the principal conveyance between the towns of Illinois, and describe great cities as new settlements; and these are the letters of a traveller then past the meridian of life, and who was living but yesterday!"

In 1848, on the death of Cole the artist, one of his early friends, Bryant was called upon to deliver a commemorative oration before the National Academy of Design, and this was probably his first appearance of that kind. To

this artist the poet had formerly addressed the following characteristic lines:—

TO COLE, THE PAINTER, DEPARTING FOR EUROPE.

Thine eyes shall see the light of distant skies;
Yet, Cole! thy heart shall bear to Europe's strand
A living image of our own bright land,
Such as upon thy glorious canvas lies;
Lone lakes—savannas where the bison roves—
Rocks rich with summer garlands—solemn streams—
Skies, where the desert eagle wheels and screams—
Spring bloom and autumn blaze of boundless groves,
Fair scenes shall greet thee where thou goest—fair,
But different—everywhere the trace of men,
Paths, homes, graves, ruins, from the lowest glen
To where life shrinks from the fierce Alpine air,
Gaze on them, till the tears shall dim thy sight,
But keep that earlier, wilder image bright.

In the spring of 1849 Bryant made a tour in the South, visiting Savannah, Augusta, and Charleston, from which last port he sailed for Cuba. His letters thence are full of accurate delineations of men and manners, and of vivid pictures of natural scenery. Every feature of the landscape and of vegetation is carefully noted.

"If he describes a cottage, he is sure not to omit to mention 'the grove of plantains behind; a thicket of bamboo near the door, waving its willow-like sprays in the wind; a pair of mango-trees near, hung with fruit just ripening, and reddish blossoms just opening; and a cocoa-tree or two, lifting high above the rest its immense feathery leaves and its clusters of green nuts.' His pages are overrun with vines, and fragrant with tropical blossoms. He, who loved the fringed gentian and the yellow violet that grew in the dells and on the hillsides at Cum-

mington, found his chief delight among the damask roses and orange-blossoms that bloomed on the bosom of the Queen of the Antilles."

The Cuban mode of burial,—namely, "piling the dead bodies one upon another, coffinless, and without funeral service"—greatly impressed him, and, in the same key as that in which he wrote "Thanatopsis," after speaking of the prevalence of cock-fighting, before he leaves the subject he describes a throng of excited people "engaged in the brutal sport, with eager gestures and loud cries;" and he keeps thinking "how soon this noisy crowd will lie in heaps in the pits of the Campo Santo." The graceful Spanish dances, "resembling the undulations of the sea in its gentlest moods," are mentioned; but the dread thought still haunts him, and he cannot help thinking, as he looks on "the gay crowd, on the quaint maskers, and the dancers, whose flexible limbs seem swayed to and fro by the breath of the music," that all this must soon end at the Campo Santo.

From Havannah he went to see the coffee-estates of San Antonio and the sugar-plantations of Matanzas, returning to New York in May.

This same summer (1849) he went to Europe for the third time, and we find him visiting Art Galleries in London, and again meeting his friend Samuel Rogers. On this visit, he went north to Orkney and Shetland.

Returning through Scotland, he visited Paris, Germany, and Switzerland. On entering the latter Republic, he rejoiced at reaching a land of freedom, after the scenes of oppression he had witnessed in countries overrun with soldiers and under military rule, at a time when the Hungarian republic was overthrown through the treachery of Görgey, and when Kossuth had to take refuge in Turkey. He says, he could "almost have kneeled and kissed the

shore of the hospitable republic. And really it was beautiful enough," he adds, "for such a demonstration of affection; for nothing could be lovelier than the declivities of that shore, with its woods and orchards and grassy meadows, and green hollows running upward to the mountain-tops, all fresh with a shower which had just passed, and now glittering in the sunshine, and interspersed with large Swiss houses bearing quaintly-carved galleries and broad overhanging roofs; while, to the east, rose the glorious summits of the Alps, mingling with the clouds."

From Geneva, he returned, by Lyons, to Paris in the month of September; and recrossed the Atlantic that autumn (1849), to resume his editorial duties, and settle for a time at home. Shortly after his return, the interesting letters which he had sent to the *Post* during his travels were collected and published, in 1850, under the title of "*Letters of a Traveller*, or Notes of Things seen in Europe and America."

In December, 1851, he presided at the banquet given by the press of New York to Kossuth, who had himself been an editor in Hungary.

Early in the following year (1852), the more solemn duty devolved on him of delivering a discourse on the life and writings of his friend Cooper, the novelist.

In the spring of this year he again paid a short visit to Cuba, and Europe,—extending his tour to the Holy Land.

In 1854 a new edition of his collected poems was published in two volumes. At this period—with the exception of the short visit to the West Indies, Europe, and the East, in 1852—for about seven years, he was chiefly at home in the enjoyment of books, nature, and domestic joy.

He had regularly every day to spend a few hours at the office of the *Post*, and, when his work there was done,

he had his peaceful happy home life, apart from politics, or even from worldly cark and care.

CHAPTER X.

1857–1866: Visits Europe—His Baptism at Naples—Wife's Illness and Recovery—Addresses—Cummington—Seventieth Birth-day Presentation—Lincoln—Death of his Wife.

Fifth Visit to Europe—Spain—Grenada—Naples—His Baptism—Religious Life—His Wife's Illness—The Life that is—Returns Home—Letters from Spain—Schiller Festival—Irving Address—Refuses Official Appointments—The Third of November—Thirty Poems—Cummington Estate—Hall at Roslyn—Presentation on Seventieth Birth-day—Bryant's Reply—The Death of Lincoln—His Wife's Death, October 1866—May Evening.

Early in 1857, Bryant made his fifth voyage to Europe, chiefly with the intention of travelling in Spain, and of sojourning for some months in that land of old romance and chivalry.

On leaving Paris, he tells us that he made a leisurely journey, accompanied by his family, through Germany, Switzerland and Southern France; and, in the autumn, through the passes of the Pyrenees and the Basque Provinces, by diligence, sometimes slowly drawn through the grand scenery of these regions by teams of oxen.

He took a month to reach Madrid, from San Sebastian, in the north of Spain, the party living in Spanish fashion. Thus they came into close contact with the people, seeing them in their own homes, and becoming familiar with the everyday aspect of their lives.

At Madrid he was the guest of Mr. Dodge the American minister, Mr. Calderon, and other distinguished people, and, during the three weeks of his stay there, he mingled with the best society of the capital.

Setting out from Madrid in November, at Alicante he left his family, and proceeded alone by steamer to Cartagena, where he spent some days deciphering Roman inscriptions, and seeing the numerous remains of Moorish architecture to be found there. On rejoining his family, they all embarked for Malaga. In December the party visited Grenada; and Bryant has given us the following charming description of this, the former seat of Moorish power and grandeur:—

"The Alhambra was the summer palace of the Moorish monarchs; a place of luxurious retreat from the relaxing heats of the season; a place of shade and running waters; courting the entrance of the winds under its arches and between its slender pillars, yet spreading a screen against the sunshine. To this end the stones of the quarry were shaded into a bower, with columns as light as the stems of the orange-trees planted in its courts, and walls incrusted with scroll-work and foliage as delicate as the leaves of the myrtle growing by its fountains. Yet the most remarkable parts of the Alhambra are those lofty rooms with circular vaults, from which hang innumerable little points like icicles, with rounded recesses between them. These are as strangely beautiful as a dream, and translate into a visible reality the poetic idea of a sparry cavern formed by genii in the chambers of the rock."

From Grenada, noted for its ugly streets and beautiful women, the party returned to Malaga, and thence, sailing across to Algiers, and seeing something of the Algerine coast, they proceeded to Marseilles.

The winter of 1858 was spent in Italy, chiefly in the neighbourhood of Naples, and his residence there was marked by two memorable events, namely—his own baptism, and his wife's recovery from a serious illness. In regard to the first:—He had been religiously brought up in the Congregational Church of New England, and,

always revering Bible truth, and strictly observing the moralities of life, he was essentially a religious man.

We may here state that when Bryant first moved to New York, personally attracted by the amiable and gifted Rev. William Ware, well known in literature by his *Letters from Palmyra*, he went to the little Unitarian chapel in Chambers' Street, off Broadway, of which that gentleman was pastor. He afterwards attended the Second Church, of which Dr. Dewy and Dr. Osgood were successively ministers. Then, finding that his old parish church, "All Souls'," of which the Rev. Dr. Bellows was pastor, was geographically more convenient for him, he went there. At Roslyn he worshipped for eighteen years in the Presbyterian Church (of which his wife was a member), under the ministry of the Rev. Dr. Ely. He never advanced views at variance with the creed of this church, where he always partook of the Lord's Supper, and he ever took a deep and practical interest in its prosperity. It was at Dr. Ely's request that Bryant wrote the hymns which were printed for private circulation. But, to resume the narrative in regard to his baptism:—At Naples he met an old acquaintance, the Rev. R. C. Waterston, of Boston, who, with his family, was living for a time in Italy. In their rambles, they were often thrown together; and one day, "in the month of April," says Curtis, "after a long walk with his friend, the Rev. Mr. Waterston, of Boston, on the shore of the Bay of Naples, he spoke with softened heart of the new beauty that he felt in the old truth, and proposed to his friend to baptize him. With prayer and hymn and spiritual meditation, a little company of seven, says Mr. Waterston, in a large upper room, as in the Christian story, partook of the communion, and with his good gray head bowed down, Bryant was baptized."

The whole of his life testifies to the deep sincerity of his modest profession.

The son of Dr. Ely writes, that his late father always "looked upon Mr. Bryant as one who took Christ as his only Saviour, and his example as his only pattern." The Rev. Dr. Bellows, after bearing strong and clear testimony to his devout reverence, charity, practical piety, and working virtue, and to the increasing sweetness and beneficence of his character, says:—"Nobody so regular in his attendance on public worship, in wet and dry, cold and heat, morning and evening, until the very last month of his life."

As to the other memorable event at Naples:—Shortly after his baptism, his wife was attacked by a nervous fever which prostrated her to such a degree that her life was despaired of, and Bryant had to walk in the Valley of the Shadow of Death. The house in which they lived commanded a fine view of the Bay of Naples; but the district was badly drained, and also exposed to the noxious gases which rose from such sewers as did reach the beach. These were the causes of an illness which nearly proved fatal. However, on her being removed from the shore to the higher garden grounds behind, she at once began, gradually, to recover. On her restoration to health, the poet gave utterance to the thoughtful, joyous feelings of his heart, in a song of gladness, written at Castellamare in his sixty-fourth year, and called

THE LIFE THAT IS.

Thou, who so long hast pressed the couch of pain,
Oh welcome, welcome back to life's free breath—
To life's free breath and day's sweet light again,
From the chill shadows of the gate of death!

For thou hadst reached the twilight bound between
The world of spirits and this grosser sphere;

Dimly by thee, the things of earth were seen,
And faintly fell earth's voices on thine ear.

And now, how gladly we behold, at last,
The wonted smile returning to thy brow;
The very wind's low whisper, breathing past,
In the light leaves, is music to thee now.

Thou wert not weary of thy lot; the earth
Was ever good and pleasant in thy sight;
Still clung thy loves about the household hearth,
And sweet was every day's returning light.

Then welcome back to all thou wouldst not leave,
To this grand march of seasons, days, and hours;
The glory of the morn, the glow of eve,
The beauty of the streams, and stars, and flowers;

To eyes on which thine own delight to rest;
To voices which it is thy joy to hear;
To the kind toils that ever pleased thee best,
The willing tasks of love, that made life dear.

Welcome to grasp of friendly hands; to prayers
Offered where crowds in reverent worship come,
Or softly breathed amid the tender cares
And loving inmates of thy quiet home.

Thou bring'st no tidings of the better land,
Even from its verge; the mysteries opened there
Are what the faithful heart may understand
In its still depths, yet words may not declare.

And well I deem, that, from the brighter side
Of life's dim border, some o'erflowing rays
Streamed from the inner glory, shall abide
Upon thy spirit through the coming days.

Twice wert thou given me; once in thy fair prime,
Fresh from the fields of youth, when first we met,
And all the blossoms of that hopeful time
Clustered and glowed where'er thy steps were set.

And now, in thy ripe autumn, once again
Given back to fervent prayers and yearnings strong,
From the drear realm of sickness and of pain
When we had watched, and feared, and trembled long.

Now may we keep thee from the balmy air
And radiant walks of heaven a little space,
Where He, who went before thee to prepare
For his meek followers, shall assign thy place.

"Early in the summer, Bryant and his family passed through the cities of Northern Italy to England, and in August returned to their home at Roslyn, after an absence of more than a year. The letters written to the *Post* during this period were collected in a volume, and published in the following year under the title of *Letters from Spain and Other Countries.*

In this volume there is a touching account of the death of the daughter of his friend Mr. Waterston at Naples; a description of a floral exhibition; and a life-like picture of San Sebastian. How beautifully he records the impressions produced on his mind by a sight of the Atlantic!

"We took places the other morning in the diligence that travels between Bayonne and San Sebastian, and passing a long alley of trees, and leaving behind the belt of handsome country seats by which Bayonne is environed, we ascended a height from which we saw the Atlantic Ocean spread before us. In green and purple it lay, its distant verge blended and lost in the mists of the horizon. I cannot describe the feeling awakened within me as I gazed on that great waste of waters which in one of its inlets steeped the walls of my own garden, and to the murmur of which on a distant shore, those I loved were doubtless at that moment slumbering. From time to time, as we went on, we descended out of sight of the sea, and rose again to see it flinging its white breakers against the land. The peaks of the Pyrenees were all the while in full view, and we were approaching the region where their western buttresses pre-

sent an eternal barrier against the assaults of the ocean, which to the north of them have hollowed out the Gulf of Gascony."

After describing the Campo Santo, or Cemetery of Bologna, as "the most sumptuous repository for the dead" which he ever saw, the author of "Thanatopsis" adds:—"So sleep the dead at Bologna. Their city is built with arcades on the streets; they walk all their lives under arcades; they are carried under arcades to their graves, and are laid under arcades in death."

On his return to New York from Europe, in November, 1859, he delivered an address at the Schiller Festival; pronouncing a just and glowing eulogy on the great German poet, whose works he admired. In 1860, he delivered a commemorative oration on Washington Irving, which was "a noble review of a beautiful and beneficent life."

He was repeatedly urged to accept honourable and lucrative offices and missions, both by Lincoln and Grant; but, being a journalist, and wishing to preserve his independence of judgment and freedom of comment, he invariably refused them. In early days, at Great Barrington, he had been town-clerk and a justice of the peace; and this year he had accepted the position of being made a presidential elector, and voted for Lincoln. With these exceptions, the last being merely honorary, he held no other government appointments.

In 1861, Bryant wrote "The Third of November," a sweet autumnal and autobiographical poem, which eloquently speaks of his great love of nature:—

THE THIRD OF NOVEMBER, 1861.

Softly breathes the west-wind beside the ruddy forest
  Taking leaf by leaf from the branches where he flies.
Sweetly streams the sunshine, this third day of November,
  Through the golden haze of the quiet autumn skies.

Tenderly the season has spared the grassy meadows,
Spared the petted flowers that the old world gave the new,
Spared the autumn-rose and the garden's group of pansies,
Late-blown dandelions and periwinkles blue.

On my cornice linger the ripe black grapes ungathered;
Children fill the groves with the echoes of their glee,
Gathering tawny chestnuts, and shouting when beside them
Drops the heavy fruit of the tall black-walnut tree.

Glorious are the woods in their latest gold and crimson,
Yet our full-leaved willows are in their freshest green.
Such a kindly autumn, so mercifully dealing
With the growths of summer, I never yet have seen.

Like this kindly season may life's decline come o'er me;
Past is manhood's summer, the frosty months are here;
Yet be genial airs and a pleasant sunshine left me,
Leaf, and fruit, and blossom, to mark the closing year!

Dreary is the time when the flowers of earth are withered;
Dreary is the time when the woodland leaves are cast—
When, upon the hillside, all hardened into iron,
Howling, like a wolf, flies the famished northern blast.

Dreary are the years when the eye can look no longer
With delight on Nature, or hope on human kind;
Oh, may those that whiten my temples, as they pass me,
Leave the heart unfrozen, and spare the cheerful mind!

In 1863 he published a volume entitled *Thirty Poems*, which were the latest he had then written. It contained an experimental translation of the fifth book of Homer's *Odyssey* in blank verse.

In 1864, Bryant completed the improvements of the old homestead on the estate at Cummington, which had passed out of the family thirty years before, but which many old endearing memories had induced him to purchase and fit up tastefully as a residence, although it was not the house in which he was born—that having been

entirely removed, from a neighbouring corner, long before. The estate was now enlarged to four hundred acres, and he improved it by cultivation, and planted many young trees to take the place of those that were hastening to decay. A quaint old building, it stands on a commanding knoll, in the midst of beautiful scenery, surrounded by old elms, greenery, and flower-beds. There is a background of lofty hills, and, in the foreground, a rippling brook, fringed with wild flowers and ferns, sings, at its own sweet will, suggesting both the mountains and the sea.

To a friend, who requested information about the home of his boyhood, Bryant in 1872 wrote as follows:—

"I am afraid that I cannot say much that will interest you or anybody else. A hundred years since this broad highland region lying between the Housatonic and the Connecticut was principally forest, and bore the name of Pontoosuc. In a few places settlers had cleared away woodlands, and cultivated the cleared spots. Bears, catamounts, and deer were not uncommon here. Wolves were sometimes seen, and the woods were dense and dark, without any natural openings or meadows. My grandfather on the mother's side came up from Plymouth County, in Massachusetts, when a young man, in the year 1773, and chose a farm on a commanding site overlooking an extensive prospect, cut down the trees on a part of it, and built a house of square logs, with a chimney as large as some kitchens, within which I remember to have sat on a bench in my childhood. About ten years afterwards he purchased, of an original settler, the contiguous farm, now called the Bryant Homestead, and having built beside a little brook, not very far from a spring, from which water was to be drawn in pipes, the house, which is now mine, he removed to it with his family. The soil of this region was then exceedingly fertile, all the settlers prospered, and my grandfather among the rest. My father, a physician and surgeon, married his daughter, and after a while came to live with him on the

homestead. He made some enlargements of the house, in one part of which he had his office, and in this, during my boyhood, were generally two or three students of medicine, who sometimes accompanied my father in his visits to his patients, always on horseback, which was the mode of travelling at that time. To this place my father brought me in my early childhood, and I have scarce an early recollection which does not relate to it.

"On the farm beside the little brook, and at a short distance from the house, stood the district school-house, of which nothing now remains but a little hollow where was once a cellar. Here I received my earliest lessons in learning, except such as were given me by my mother, and here, when ten years old, I declaimed a copy of verses composed by me as a description of a district school. The little brook which runs by the house, on the site of the old district school-house, was in after years made the subject of a little poem, entitled 'The Rivulet.' To the south of the house is a wood of tall trees, clothing a declivity, and touching with its outermost boughs the grass of a moist meadow at the foot of the hill, which suggested the poem entitled 'An Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood.'

"In the year 1835 the place passed out of the family; and at the end of thirty years I repurchased it, and made various repairs of the house and additions to its size. A part of the building which my father had added, and which contained his office, had, in the meantime, been detached from it, and moved off down a steep hill to the side of the Westfield River. I supplied its place by a new wing, with the same external form, though of less size, in which is now my library.

"The site of the house is uncommonly beautiful. Before it, to the east, the ground descends, first gradually, and then rapidly, to the Westfield River, flowing in a deep and narrow valley, from which is heard, after a copious rain, the roar of its swollen current, itself unseen. In the spring-time, when the frost-bound waters are loosened by a warm rain, the roar and crash are remarkably loud, as the icy crust of the stream is broken, and the masses of ice are swept along by the flood

over the stones with which the bed of the river is paved. Beyond the narrow valley of the Westfield the surface of the country rises again gradually, carrying the eye over a region of vast extent, interspersed with farm-houses, pasture-grounds, and wooded heights, where, on a showery day, you sometimes see two or three different showers, each watering its own separate district; and in winter-time two or three different snow-storms moving dimly from place to place.

"The soil of the whole of this highland region is disintegrated mica slate, for the most part. It has its peculiar growth of trees, shrubs, and wild flowers, differing considerably from those of the eastern part of the state. In autumn the woods are peculiarly beautiful with their brightness and variety of hues. The higher farms of this region lie nearly two thousand feet above tide-water. The air is pure and healthful; the summer temperature is most agreeable; but the spring is coy in her approaches, and winter often comes before he is bidden. No venomous reptile inhabits any part of this region, as I think there is no tradition of a rattlesnake or copperhead having been seen here."

The Cummington homestead is elsewhere described, as "a spacious and rambling mansion of two stories and a half, with a curb-roof, antique dormer-windows, and broad porches curtained with clambering vines, and surrounded with a smooth-shaven lawn. Here the poet kept part of his library, and had a pleasant study; and here, in the latter years of his life, he spent the autumn among the variegated foliage of the forest-trees and the golden fruitage of his orchards. Here he founded a public library for the use of his rural neighbours, and built a substantial school-house for the education of their children. These benefactions were made without the slightest ostentation, and from the purest regard for the happiness and improvement of those around him."

At Roslyn, he displayed a similar interest in the wants

of the neighbourhood, and there, also, he was regarded with respect and affection by all kinds of people. There, he built a beautiful hall for public uses. "When, at his request," says the Rev. Dr. Bellows, "I went to dedicate it, and at a proper moment asked, 'What shall we call this building?' the audience shouted, 'Bryant Hall!'—'No,' said the honest benefactor; 'let it be known and called simply 'The Hall:' and the 'The Hall' it was baptized."

Few poets have been so favourably circumstanced as Bryant in regard to "local habitation"—to say nothing of "name;" for he possessed three dwelling-places—an elegant town residence in New York, and two in the country—Cummington, and Cedarmere near Roslyn, where he received his friends from far and near, and practically interested himself in the well-being of all whom his benign influence could reach.

He usually spent from December to May, in New York city; from 1st May to end of July, in Roslyn; and August and September, in Cummington.

His carriages and horses were for his friends, as he himself nearly always preferred to walk.

On November 5th, 1864, Bryant was honoured by the painters and poets of America holding a festival to commemorate his seventieth birth-day, and presenting him with paintings and poems. The Century Club, of which he was one of the founding members, was selected as the most appropriate place for the offering. The congratulatory address was delivered by Bancroft, who presided on the occasion; while, in addition to the poetical tributes which he received, the president of the National Academy addressed the venerable poet, and presented him with upwards of forty oil-paintings, all of them gifts from painters who were members of the Century Club.

In replying to Bancroft's speech Bryant very happily said:—

"I am congratulated on having completed my seventieth year. Is there nothing ambiguous, Mr. President, in such a compliment?—to be congratulated on having reached that stage of life when the bodily and mental powers pass into decline and decay! Lear is made by Shakespeare to say,

'Age is unnecessary.'

And a later poet, Dr. Johnson, expressed the same idea in one of his sonorous lines,—

'Superfluous lags the veteran on the stage.'

You have not forgotten, Mr. President, the old Greek saying,—

'Whom the gods love die young.'

nor the passage in Shakespeare,—

'O sir! the good die first,
And they whose hearts are dry as summer dust
Burn to the socket.'

"What a world would this be if it were made up of old men!—generation succeeding to generation, of hoary ancients who had but half a dozen years, or perhaps half that time, to live! What new work would be attempted? what existing abuse or evil corrected? What strange subjects would such a world afford for the pencils of our artists!—groups of superannuated graybeards basking in the sun through the long days of spring, or huddling like sheep in warm corners in the winter time; houses with the timbers dropping apart; cities in ruins; roads unwrought and impassable; weedy gardens, and fields with the surface feebly scratched to put in a scanty harvest; feeble old men climbing into crazy wagons, perhaps to be run away with, or mounting horses, if they mounted them at all, in terror of being hurled from their backs, like a

stone from a sling. Well it is that in this world of ours the old men are but a very small minority."

The whole of the proceedings on this interesting occasion have been recorded and published in a little volume.

In April, 1865, Bryant wrote the following poem on

THE DEATH OF LINCOLN.

Oh, slow to smite and swift to spare,
Gentle and merciful and just!
Who, in the fear of God, didst bear
The sword of power, a nation's trust!

In sorrow by thy bier we stand,
Amid the awe that hushes all,
And speak the anguish of a land
That shook with horror at thy fall.

Thy task is done; the bond are free:
We bear thee to an honoured grave,
Whose proudest monument shall be
The broken fetters of the slave.

Pure was thy life; its bloody close
Hath placed thee with the sons of light,
Among the noble host of those
Who perished in the cause of Right.

On July 27th, 1866, Bryant was overshadowed by the one great sorrow of his life—the loss of her who had been his true wife and helpmate, the veritable sunshine of his active life, and the realized ideal of his fairest dreams. She passed away in peace, and was laid in the Roslyn Cemetery, which is situated about a mile east of that village, and half a mile south of Cedarmere. It is on the western slope of a wooded hill, and surrounded by a hedge of evergreens. Within the inclosure are some fine beech, oak, and maple trees, and shrubbery. Near the

western side rises a tall unpolished gray granite obelisk, on which was placed the following inscription:—

FANNY FAIRCHILD BRYANT,
The beloved wife of William Cullen Bryant,
An humble disciple of Christ,
Exemplary in every relation of life,
Affectionate, sympathetic, sincere,
And ever occupied with the welfare of others.
Born March 27, 1797,
Died July 27, 1866.

Two grandchildren—the children of Parke Godwin—also lie buried within the inclosure.

Richard H. Dana, in writing to a friend, on August 9th, 1866, said:—

"Dear Bryant, my fast friend of so many years. Sorrow and loss have come to him. He and his children have had taken from them the most wifely of wives, and most worthy of mothers—serenely cheerful, out of an affectionate heart, and infusing her own blessed spirit into you."

Of her, as we have seen, Bryant had written, "Oh Fairest of the Rural Maids," "The Future Life," "The Life that is;" and, that same year, when the October sun fell on her grave, he wrote:—

"May we not think that near us thou dost stand
With loving ministrations? for we know
Thy heart was never happy when thy hand
Was forced its tasks of mercy to forego.

"Mayst thou not prompt with every coming day
The generous aim and act, and gently win
Our restless, wandering thoughts to turn away
From every treacherous path that ends in sin?"

Later on, with the solemn requiem feeling mingled the bright anticipations of Christian hope, and we have those sweet, sad verses called

A LIFE-TIME.

And well I know that a brightness
From his life has passed away,
And a smile from the green earth's beauty,
And a glory from the day.

But I behold above him,
In the far blue depths of air,
Dim battlements shining faintly,
And a throng of faces there;

See over crystal barrier
The airy figures bend
Like those who are watching and waiting
The coming of a friend.

And one there is among them,
With a star upon her brow,
In her life a lovely woman,
A sinless seraph now

I know the sweet, calm features,
The peerless smile I know;
And I stretch my arms with transport
From where I stand below.

And the quick tears drown my eyelids;
But the airy figures fade,
And the shining battlements darken,
And blend with the evening shade.

I am gazing into the twilight,
Where the dim-seen meadows lie;
And the wind of night is swaying
The trees with a heavy sigh.

And in another poem, called "May Evening," one of his latest pieces, he thus alludes to her and his sense of loss—while the pine and willow, in the balmy evening air, redolent of fragrant flowers, seem now only to sigh over the buried dead, when he touchingly exclaims:—

"Yet there is sadness in thy soft caress,
Wind of the blooming year!
The gentle presence, that was wont to bless
Thy coming,—is not here."

CHAPTER XI.

1867–1876: Last Visit to Europe—Homeric Translations—Speech at Williams College—Mexico—Orations—Eightieth Birth-day—Vase Presentation—Bryant's Reply.

Visits Europe for the Last Time—Translates Homer—Morse Dinner—Halleck Oration—Poetical Speech at Williams College—Verplanck Address—The Iliad—The Odyssey—Morse Statue—Mexico—Popular History of the United States—Reform Address—Orations Published—Copyright Memorandum—Picturesque America—Eightieth Birth-day—Vase Presentation—Bryant's Modest Reply.

In 1867, Bryant visited Europe for the last time, but change of scene did not now, as before, revive and yield him the repose for which he longed, for he was alone. So he hastened home again to take refuge in work. In addition to his usual editorial routine, he continued his Homeric studies, tasking himself to translate at least forty lines a day, although he often exceeded, and sometimes doubled that number.

Between the years 1834 and 1867, inclusive, Bryant made six visits to the Old World. In a letter, addressed to General James Grant Wilson, he says:—"I went six times to Europe. In 1834, with my wife and family, returning in 1836. In 1845; but I did not visit the Shetland Islands till four years later, in 1849. My fourth visit was in 1852, when I went to the Holy Land. In 1857, I made a fifth voyage to Europe with my wife and younger daughter. In 1867, I went over the sixth time. In both these last voyages I visited Spain."

In 1868, he delivered a speech at a dinner given to Morse, in which he spoke of the wonders of the telegraph in overcoming space and time. From that speech, we have already given an extract, when treating of his editorial career.

On February 3rd, 1869, he delivered a sympathetic and eloquent oration on the life and writings of his friend Fitz-Greene Halleck, the poet.

This year, his *Letters from the East* were published; and he was also present, at Commencement time, at Williams College, listening attentively to the orations of the young men, and, when called upon, among other speakers, for remarks, after the usual dinner of the *alumni*, he said:—

"It has occurred to me, since I, in the decline of life, came to visit once more this seat of learning, in which our youth are trained to succeed us on the stage of the world, that I am in the situation of one, who, standing on a spot desolate with Winter and dim with twilight, should be permitted, by a sort of miracle, to look upon a neighbouring region glorious with the bloom of Spring, and bright with the beams of morning. On the side where I stand, I see, perhaps, fields and leafless woods, pools sheeted with ice, a frozen soil, and the shadows of approaching night. On the side to which I look, I see emerald meadows, fields of springing wheat, orchards in bloom, transparent streams, and a genial sunshine. With me, it is too late for any further hopeful tillage, and if the plough were put into the ground, its coulter would be obstructed by the ice-bound sods. On the side to which I look, I see the tokens of judicious culture and careful tendency, recompensed by a free and promising growth. I rejoice at the kindly care thus bestowed, and my hope and prayer is, that under such auspices all the promises which meet my eyes may be amply fulfilled, and that, from these luxuriant fields, a harvest may be gathered richer and more abundant than has ever yet been stored in the granaries of the land."

On the evening of May 17th, 1870, Bryant delivered an address, on the life and writings of his friend, Gulian C. Verplanck, before the New York Historical Society, speaking of him with admiration and affectionate regard.

"The literary life," says General James Grant Wilson, "which began more than sixty years ago, was crowned by his translations of Homer. He was more than threescore and ten, when he set himself to the formidable task of adding another to the many translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The former occupied most of his leisure hours for three years, and the latter about two; being completed when Mr. Bryant was well advanced in his seventy-seventh year. The opinion has been pronounced by competent critics, that these will hold their own with the translations of Pope, Chapman, Newman, or the late Earl Derby."

Under the heavy pressure of grief caused by the loss of his wife, he wisely wrought at this formidable undertaking, in order to distract and occupy his thoughts.

In December, 1869, the translation of the *Iliad* was completed, and it was published in 1870. We give the following specimen, from the beginning of the eighth book:—

"Now Morn in saffron robes had shed her light
O'er all the earth, when Jove the Thunderer
Summoned the gods to council on the heights
Of many-peaked Olympus. He addressed
The assembly, and all listened as he spake:—
'Hear, all ye gods and all ye goddesses!
While I declare the thought within my breast,
Let none of either sex presume to break
The law I give, but cheerfully obey,
That my design may sooner be fulfilled.
Whoever, stealing from the rest, shall seek
To aid the Grecian cause, or that of Troy,
Back to Olympus scourged and in disgrace

Shall he be brought; or I will seize and hurl
The offender down to rayless Tartarus,
Deep, deep in the great gulf below the earth,
With iron gates and threshold forged of brass,
As far beneath the shades as earth from heaven.
Then shall he learn how greatly I surpass
All other gods in power. Try, if ye will,
Ye gods, that all may know: suspend from heaven
A golden chain; let all the immortal host
Cling to it from below: ye could not draw,
Strive as ye might, the all-disposing Jove
From heaven to earth. And yet, if I should choose
To draw it upward to me, I should lift,
With it and you, the earth itself and sea
Together; and I then would bind the chain
Around the summit of the Olympian mount,
And they should hang aloft, so far my power
Surpasses all the power of gods and men.'"

The marked success of the *Iliad* encouraged him to go on with the *Odyssey*, which, without pause, he began and also completed; it was published in December, 1871. The veteran bard was in his seventy-seventh year when he completed the Herculean Homeric task.

We give the following lines, in his translation, from the fifth book of the *Odyssey*:—

"He spake; the herald Argicide obeyed,
And hastily beneath his feet he bound
The fair, ambrosial, golden sandals, worn
To bear him over ocean like the wind,
And o'er the boundless land. His wand he took,
Wherewith he softly seals the eyes of men,
And opens them at will from sleep. With this
In hand, the mighty Argos-queller flew,
And lighting on Pieria, from the sky
Plunged downward from the deep, and skimmed its face
Like hovering sea-mew, that on the broad gulfs

Of the unfruitful ocean seeks her prey,
And often dips her pinions in the brine.
So Hermes flew along the waste of waves.
But when he reached that island, far away,
Forth from the dark-blue ocean-swell he stepped
Upon the sea-beach, walking till he came
To the vast cave in which the bright-haired nymph
Made her abode. He found the nymph within.
A fire blazed brightly on the hearth, and far
Was wafted o'er the isle the fragrant smoke
Of cloven cedar, burning in the flame,
And cypress-wood. Meanwhile, in her recess,
She sweetly sang, as busily she threw
The golden shuttle through the web she wove.
And all about the grotto alders grew,
And poplars, and sweet-smelling cypresses,
In a green forest, high among whose boughs
Birds of broad wings, wood-owls and falcons, built
Their nests, and crows, with voices sounding far,
All haunting for their food the ocean-side.
Around were meadows of soft green, o'ergrown
With violets and parsley. 'Twas a spot
Where even an Immortal might, awhile,
Linger, and gaze with wonder and delight."

These translations have been well received, and, in some respects, are acknowledged by scholars to be more nervous and literal than any preceding metrical translations. Mr. Bryant is a thorough master of blank verse, and this achievement is a fitting laurel crown for a long and successful literary career, in every respect as pure as it has been prosperous.

In the summer of this year (1871), on June 10th, having been called upon, he delivered an oration at the unveiling of the Morse statue in Central Park, a merited honour paid to a living scientist. Requiring relaxation after the completion of the *Odyssey*, Bryant went south

and spent the winter of 1871–72 in Mexico, sending home letters, containing the results of his observation, for publication in the *Post*:—"It will thus be seen," says his friend, General James Grant Wilson, "that the poet has been a great traveller, and seems as unwilling as that ancient worthy, Ulysses, whose wanderings he has of late put in such fitting English verse, to let his faculties rust in idleness." Of Bryant's letters, collected from the *Evening Post*, General Wilson also writes:—"These charming volumes, 'born from his travelling thigh,' as Ben Jonson quaintly expressed it—are written in a style of English prose distinguished for its purity and simplicity. The genial love of nature, and the lurking tendency to humour, which they everywhere betray, prevent their severe simplicity from running into hardness, and give them a freshness and occasional glow, in spite of their prevailing propriety and reserve."

On his return from Mexico much of his time was given to the revision of the manuscript for the *Popular History of the United States*, published by the Scribners, and which was the latest prose work he undertook to edit. The second volume was issued before his death, and the completion of the work was afterwards placed in the hands of its associate editor, Sidney Howard Gay.

In the autumn of 1872, on September 23d, he gave a short but stirring address on "Reform," at the Cooper Institute; in which, like a Hebrew prophet, he fiercely denounced the gigantic and rampant frauds of the "ring" robbers, and explained how they might be effectually checkmated.

He also delivered eloquent orations, on the inauguration of the Shakspere and Scott monuments, in Central Park.

In 1872, all these various charming Orations and Addresses were collected and published in a volume.

Bryant, ever desirous of aiding progress, and with large views, was always in the van when such movements required to be made. As an instance in point, General James Grant Wilson tells us, that, recently, he came upon a document, "which, in these days of international copyright agitation, is of some interest. It runs thus:—

"'*The British and American Copyright League* is an association having for its object the passage of an International Copyright Law in America and in England, and in favour of such other countries as are willing to reciprocate, which shall secure to *authors* the same control over their own productions as is accorded to inventors, who, if they so elect, can patent their inventions in all the countries of Europe. This is the first organized attempt that has been made to bring about this very desirable result. As a preliminary step, it is proposed to get the approval of those immediately interested, and your signature to the inclosed circular is therefore respectfully requested.'

"This is signed 'Wm. C. Bryant, Secretary of the British and American Copyright League.' The 'inclosed circular' is a brief declaration of approval of the efforts of the League to secure the passage of an international copyright law, and bears the signatures of Bryant, Longfellow, Emerson, Whittier, Garrison, Beecher, Holmes, Mrs. Stowe, Miss Alcott, Prof. Dana, Howells, Aldrich, and other well-known authors. This excellent beginning was made in 1873, but, for some reason, was not pushed to any practical outcome. It was, however, one of the signs of the change now becoming manifest."

In 1873, Bryant edited *Picturesque America*, a handsome quarto volume published by the Appletons.

In 1874, Bryant's friends and admirers, backed by the citizens of New York and the entire press of the country, met to devise a plan for commemorating his eightieth

birth-day and doing him honour. When they met to deliberate, it was suggested that a silver vase of original design and choice workmanship, symbolizing in its sculpture the character of Bryant's life and writings, should be procured by a popular subscription, to be ultimately placed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This suggestion approved, an influential committee was appointed to carry out the proposition. Accordingly, on the 3d of November, a deputation waited upon the poet, at his city residence in Sixteenth Street, when the following congratulatory letter — signed by many distinguished names, of all ranks, opinions, and professions, throughout the United States—was presented to him, accompanied with a few introductory remarks by Jonathan Sturges. The whole tone of the letter was honourable, alike to the donors and to the recipient:—

"WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT, Nov. 3, 1874.

"Honoured and Dear Sir,—We, your friends and fellow-citizens, congratulate you upon completing your eightieth year in such vigour of body and mind. We give you our heartiest wishes for your continued health and happiness; and we inform you respectfully of the intention to embody in a commemorative vase, of original design and choice workmanship, the lessons of your literary and civic career in its relations with our country, whose nature, history, liberty, law, and conscience you have so illustrated. We believe that such a work will be an expressive fact of our coming National Centennial, and a permanent treasure of our Metropolitan Museum of Art. We only add, that we desire that this tribute of gratitude should come from your friends throughout the country, without distinction of party or section; and that our American women shall be encouraged to unite in the act, since our mothers, wives, and daughters are ready to declare their obligation to you for the pure language and sentiment which you have given to the homes and schools of the nation."

The design of the vase was made by Mr. James H. Whitehouse, of the firm of Tiffany & Co. "When the Bryant testimonial was first mentioned to me," says that gentleman, "my thoughts at once flew to the country,—to the crossing of the boughs of trees, to the plants and flowers, and to a general contemplation of Nature; and these, together with a certain Homeric influence, produced in my mind the germ of the design,—the form of a Greek vase, with the most beautiful American flowers growing round and entwining themselves gracefully about it, each breathing its own particular story as it grew."

Nearly two years elapsed before the vase was completed and ready for the presentation, to Bryant, which took place in Chickering Hall, New York, on June 20th, 1876, before a large, influential, and appreciative audience.

The silver vase is of the finest *repoussé* work, and cost five thousand dollars—or about a thousand pounds sterling.

"The vase is completely covered with significant figures. On one side, there is a medallion with the poet's head, and on the reverse, another medallion with two female figures,—Poetry contemplating Nature. Some of the representations have an historic meaning. In one, the poet is learning the art of verse from his father, who points to Homer as his master. In another, the boy-poet is musing in a grove, as if dwelling upon the images of 'Thanatopsis.' In a third, the most primitive form of the printing-press represents the labours of the journalist. In a fourth, he is the translator of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In another medallion is an open book, nameless, but evidently designed to turn our thoughts toward the Book of books, from which the poet drew the precepts of his life. The waterfowl and the fringed gentian are among the ornaments; while the primrose and ivy represent youth

and age; the amaranth, immortality; the eglantine, the spirit of poetry; the water-lily, eloquence; the bobolink, humorous verse; the lyre and broken shackles, the poet's work in the abolition of slavery; the Indian corn and cotton, his interest in industrial enterprises." The famous line "Truth crushed to earth shall rise again" is given in the form of an ornamental border, inlaid with gold, encircling the neck.

The presentation of the vase now was only the sequel and fulfilment of the interview which the committee had with Bryant, on November 3rd, 1874,—his eightieth birthday.

After the rendering of some national airs on the organ, Dr. Osgood presented the vase to Mr. Bryant, opening his speech with the following words:—"We and our children have received many and precious gifts from you, Mr. Bryant; and now we bring a gift to you in return, not to cancel, but to express our obligation;" and concluding it as follows:—"We can all join in this deference, whether native or foreign born, Knickerbockers or New-Englanders, Eastern, Western, Northern, or Southern; for we all know you and respect you. You have helped turn out the knaves and put honest men into power You stood by the old flag in the great struggle when 'God and Our Country' was the motto, and you are standing by it now, when 'Honest Men and Honest Money' is the issue of the time. . . . You have not lost ground by living with us; and you have risen from a young man of thirty to a full-grown man—I will not say an old man—of over eighty, as hearty and active as ever. . . . You still live the life which this vase embodies. You still see and enjoy the charm of nature; the gentian, the violet, the primrose, and the apple-blossom delight you as ever; you hear the hymn of the forest and the song of the stars;

the merry Robert of Lincoln sings for you his genial glee, and the solemn water-fowl preaches with untiring wing. Your Muse, that began with 'Thanatopsis,' promises to make 'Athanasia' her swan-song as the lengthening shadows point toward morning.

"Accept this gift, with all its sculptures and memorials, the study of many thoughtful hours, and the trophy of more than a thousand days' work, all throbbing with heart-beats, as at once our record and our blessing. This exquisite form brings beauty from the land of old Homer to join with truth and grace from our new America in celebrating your birth-day. It means more than we can say. But we can say, for our country and for ourselves, that it means, 'God bless you, Mr. Bryant!'"

A copy of verses was also presented to the poet, written for the occasion by the Rev. Horatio N. Powers of the Episcopal Church, in which occur the following lines:—

"Thanks for thy pure, majestic song,
Thy golden years, o'ermeasured span,
Thy valiant will to smite the wrong,
Thy vast, unconquered love of man.

"Thanks for thy simple faith and truth;
Thanks for thy wisdom deep and calm,
The freshness of thy generous youth,
Thy life—a sweet, triumphant psalm."

Of Bryant, and his appearance on entering the hall on that interesting occasion, Dr. Osgood afterwards said, at the Memorial Meeting of the Goethe Club:—

"His quick and gentle eye and delicate and vigorous senses, and his apt and agile hand and foot showed the sensibility and strength that marked his career, and enabled his pen to paint his page with beauty, and to point it with truth and

courage. His intellect looked out of his refined and manly face, and promised wise insight rather than elaborate analysis. He was more of a practical sage than a speculative philosopher, and more fond of seeing and showing the form and movement of life, than of anatomizing its vitals. In his affections, he was kindly and constant, and, if somewhat reserved in society, and not always open like the rose when it has bloomed, he was like the water-lily that opened anew at the touch of sunshine. He had many friends, and kept and served them and made sacrifices for them. He never set himself above the lowliest of his associates, and he was as free from arrogance as servility. In his way, indeed, he was a very proud man, the proudest that I ever knew. He never sought out the great after the standard of this world's gold and rank, and he never turned away from the poor and humble. He was never frightened by numbers, position, and wealth, while very sensitive toward favour. I never knew him to be agitated but once, and that was two years ago, in this hall, when, as he came to receive a national tribute, the whole of the great assembly, without a hint or a suggestion, rose up in reverence, and then the old poet trembled for a moment like a child."

Bryant's modest reply, on receiving the vase, is very characteristic of the man, and well worthy of preservation:—

"I shall begin what I have to say with thanks, and with thanks I shall end it—thanks to my excellent friends who have concurred in the presentation of this beautiful vase, thanks to the artists by whom it is designed and executed, thanks to my friend the chairman of the Committee for the obliging expressions with which he has accompanied the presentation, and thanks to this fair audience for the encouragement of their presence. After expressing my acknowledgments for the honour done me, it would be easiest for me to take refuge in silence; but this would hardly become me after the kind words addressed to me and the superb gift offered to my acceptance. I fear that I might be accused

of imitating an example of which I remember to have read some forty years since. A volunteer military company in a provincial town in England on a time presented their captain with a silver pitcher. The non-commissioned officer who presented it, approaching his commander, held it out to him, and said, 'Captain, here's the jug.' To this the captain replied, 'Ay, is that the jug?' And there the speech-making ended, and the company were ready for the festivities of the evening. I am afraid that a similar condensation of what I have to say might be as ridiculous.

"Mr. Chairman of the Committee, and you, my good friends, who have done me the honour to be here, I would not have you understand that I have the great presumption to take the obliging things said of me as my due, or this superb gift before me as earned by any service which I have rendered in any quarter. I wish I deserved it all, but, knowing better in my heart, I put a large balance—a very large one—to the credit of your generosity. What merit would be yours if I had fairly earned all that you are bestowing upon me? You would be simply doing your duty; you would be paying a debt. I should have no thanks to give, and you no honour for your benefaction. But consider it in the other light: suppose that I receive these testimonials of your kindness without having earned them, and this proceeding becomes an act of munificence, noble, princely, imperial—a munificence deserving to be extolled in the choicest phrases which language can supply, inasmuch as it is like the bounty which showers the genial rain and pours the sweet sunshine on the unjust as well as the just, and under the influence of benignant seasons ripens the harvests of the field for Tweed as well as for Dr. Muhlenberg.

"And now a word concerning the superb vase which is before me, the work of artists who are the worthy successors of Benvenuto Cellini, and eminent in their department. It has been greatly admired by those who have seen it, and deserves their admiration. I remember to have read, I think, some half-century ago, a definition of the term genius—

making it to consist in the faculty of accomplishing great results by small means—the power, in short, which an individual has of overcoming difficulties by a forecast and vigour not possessed by others, converting obstacles into instruments of success. This vase I may call a product of genius, both in the design and the execution; for who would suppose that any skill of the artist could connect with such a subject as he had before him images so happily conceived, so full of expression, and so well combining expression with grace? My friends, we authors cultivate a short-lived reputation; one generation of us pushes another from the stage; the very language in which we write becomes a jargon, and we cease to be read; but a work like this is always beautiful, always admired. Age has no power over its charm. Hereafter some one may say, 'This beautiful vase was made in honour of a certain American poet, whose name it bears, but whose writings are forgotten. It is remarkable that so much pains should have been taken to illustrate the life and writings of one whose works are so completely unknown at the present day.' Thus, gentlemen artists, I shall be indebted to you for causing the memory of my name to outlast that of my writings."

The vase itself, by Mr. Bryant's permission, was exposed to the view of the public in the great Centennial Exhibition, where it attracted great attention; and it is now deposited in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

CHAPTER XII.

1876: Library of Poetry and Song—Selection of Poems from 1876, Illustrated Edition — Characteristics of Bryant's Poetry—His Christian Hymns—Exquisite Art—Reputation Safe—His Reading of Nature.

Library of Poetry and Song, Enlarged Edition—Centennial Ode—Illustrated Edition of Poems—Painstaking Habits of Composition—The Antiquity of Freedom—Hymn of the Sea—The Land of Dreams—The Burial of Love—The May Sun—The Planting of the Apple-tree—The Snow-shower—The Wind and Stream—Robert of Lincoln—Characteristics of Bryant's Poetry—Sella—The Little People of the Snow—The Death of Slavery—The Flood of Years—Hymns—Blessed are they that Mourn—O North, with all thy Vales of Green!—Bryant's Art Exquisite—His Reputation Safe—His Reading of Nature.

In 1876 it was determined to give *The Library of Poetry and Song* a thorough revision, and issue it in quarto form. This work had first appeared, in 1870, in octavo size, with an introduction by Bryant, who had also either passed or rejected every poem that the MS. work contained, besides supplying other matter; so that each poem was reviewed and judged of, by him, before it took its place in the work. To quote Bryant's own words:—"At the request of the publishers," he says, "I undertook to write an introduction to the present work, and in pursuance of this design I find that I have come into a somewhat closer personal relation with the book. In its progress it has passed entirely under my revision. . . . I have, as requested, exercised a free hand, both in excluding, and in adding matter, according to my judgment of what was best adapted to the purposes of the enterprise."

Bryant greatly interested himself in the enlargement and reconstruction of the work, giving it the full benefit

of his fine taste and ripe judgment. Both editions contained his admirable and concise introduction, in the form of an essay on "The Poets and Poetry of the English Language." The work was not completed till after his death, when a "Memorial Number," containing a valuable biographical memoir of Bryant, prepared by General James Grant Wilson, was prefixed to a work, which has been characterized as "the cream of seven hundred volumes in one." Bryant himself was wont to call it the "Family Library;" and from its origination, in 1870, to its final completion (in 1878) in its various editions and forms, it has carried his name into a hundred thousand American homes.

Bryant, by request, wrote the following hymn, for the opening of the Centennial International Exposition at Philadelphia:—

CENTENNIAL HYMN.

Through storm and calm the years have led
Our nation on from stage to stage,
A century's space, until we tread
The threshold of another age.

We see where o'er our pathway swept
A torrent stream of blood and fire;
And thank the guardian power who kept
Our sacred league of states entire.

Oh! chequered train of years, farewell,
With all thy strifes and hopes and fears;
But with us let thy memories dwell,
To warn and teach the coming years.

And thou, the new-beginning age,
Warned by the past, and not in vain,
Write on a fairer, whiter page
The record of thy happier reign.

In 1876 appeared a beautiful illustrated edition of his poetical works, containing all deemed worthy of preservation, that he had published down to that date.

We shall here quote some of his more recent poems, and a few of earlier date, which have not been already given. But, before doing so, we would again call the attention of readers to the great care which Bryant bestowed on every word he wrote. With him the thought was ever the first consideration; and then, he endeavoured to clothe it in the best possible form.

To illustrate his careful habits of composition, and the very great pains which Bryant bestowed on his verse, we quote the following passage from the recollections of an old acquaintance:—

"Some years since, Professor C. M. Dodd, of Williams College, showed me a manuscript copy of one of Mr. Bryant's poems, which he had received from the author. It revealed the process by which a poem was constructed—the different stages of its growth. The poem was 'The Tides,' and there were five copies, written on five separate pieces of paper. In each successive copy there were changes in every stanza except the first one. That seems to have assumed a form satisfactory to the author before he committed it to paper. It appeared in each copy, in the same form in which it was printed. Every other stanza received many changes. Sometimes a form of expression appeared in one copy, and was discarded in the next copy, and restored in the third; and many of the stanzas were written over more than five times—the last one, seventeen times, before it was allowed to stand as it was printed.

"When Mr. Bryant gave Professor Dodd the manuscript, he informed him that there were several antecedent manuscripts relating to the poem, containing hints and suggestions, intelligible only to the author. Hence, he had not given them to him."

Bryant opens his poem on "The Antiquity of Freedom," by speaking of old trees; and, through them, mark how

finely he first approaches, and afterwards takes leave of his theme!

THE ANTIQUITY OF FREEDOM.

Here are old trees, tall oaks, and gnarlèd pines,
That stray with gray-green mosses; here the ground
Was never trenched by spade, and flowers spring up
Unsown, and die ungathered. It is sweet
To linger here, among the flitting birds
And leaping squirrels, wandering brooks, and winds
That shake the leaves, and scatter, as they pass,
A fragrance from the cedars, thickly set
With pale-blue berries. In these peaceful shades--
Peaceful, unpruned, immeasurably old---
My thoughts go up the long dim path of years,
Back to the earliest days of liberty.

O Freedom! thou art not, as poets dream,
A fair young girl, with light and delicate limbs,
And wavy tresses gushing from the cap
With which the Roman master crowned his slave
When he took off the gyves. A bearded man,
Armed to the teeth, art thou; one mailèd hand
Grasps the broad shield, and one the sword; thy brow,
Glorious in beauty though it be, is scarred
With tokens of old wars; thy massive limbs
Are strong with struggling. Power at thee has launched
His bolts, and with his lightnings smitten thee;
They could not quench the life thou hast from heaven;
Merciless Power has dug thy dungeon deep,
And his swart armourers, by a thousand fires,
Have forged thy chain; yet, while he deems thee bound,
The links are shivered, and the prison-walls
Fall outward; terribly thou springest forth,
As springs the flame above a burning pile,
And shoutest to the nations, who return
Thy shoutings, while the pale oppressor flies.

Thy birthright was not given by human hands:
Thou wert twin-born with man. In pleasant fields,
While yet our race was few, thou sat'st with him,
To tend the quiet flock and watch the stars,
And teach the reed to utter simple airs.
Thou by his side, amid the tangled wood,
Didst war upon the panther and the wolf,
His only foes; and thou with him didst draw
The earliest furrow on the mountain-side,
Soft with the deluge. Tyranny himself,
Thy enemy, although of reverend look,
Hoary with many years, and far obeyed,
Is later born than thou; and as he meets
The grave defiance of thine elder eye,
The usurper trembles in his fastnesses.

Thou shalt wax stronger with the lapse of years,
But he shall fade into a feebler age—
Feebler, yet subtler. He shall weave his snares,
And spring them on thy careless steps, and clap
His withered hands, and from their ambush call
His hordes to fall upon thee. He shall send
Quaint maskers, wearing fair and gallant forms
To catch thy gaze, and uttering graceful words
To charm thy ear; while his sly imps, by stealth,
Twine round thee threads of steel, light thread on thread,
That grow to fetters; or bind down thy arms
With chains concealed in chaplets. Oh! not yet
Mayst thou unbrace thy corslet, nor lay by
Thy sword; nor yet, O Freedom! close thy lids
In slumber; for thine enemy never sleeps,
And thou must watch and combat till the day
Of the new earth and heaven. But wouldst thou rest
Awhile from tumult and the frauds of men,
These old and friendly solitudes invite
Thy visit. They, while yet the forest-trees
Were young upon the unviolated earth,
And yet the moss-stains on the rock were new,
Beheld thy glorious childhood, and rejoiced.

Fresh, as the living breath of the ocean itself, is his beautiful "Hymn of the Sea."

A HYMN OF THE SEA.

The sea is mighty, but a mightier sways
His restless billows. Thou, whose hands have scooped
His boundless gulfs and built his shore, thy breath,
That moved in the beginning o'er his face,
Moves o'er it evermore. The obedient waves
To its strong motion roll, and rise and fall.
Still from that realm of rain thy cloud goes up,
As at the first, to water the great earth,
And keep her valleys green. A hundred realms
Watch its broad shadow warping on the wind,
And in the dropping shower, with gladness hear
Thy promise of the harvest. I look forth
Over the boundless blue, where joyously
The bright crests of innumerable waves
Glance to the sun at once, as when the hands
Of a great multitude are upward flung
In acclamation. I behold the ships
Gliding from cape to cape, from isle to isle,
Or stemming toward far lands, or hastening home
From the Old World. It is thy friendly breeze
That bears them, with the riches of the land,
And treasure of dear lives, till, in the port,
The shouting seaman climbs and furls the sail.

But who shall bide thy tempest, who shall face
The blast that wakes the fury of the sea?
O God! thy justice makes the world turn pale,
When on the armèd fleet, that royally
Bears down the surges, carrying war, to smite
Some city, or invade some thoughtless realm,
Descends the fierce tornado. The vast hulks
Are whirled like chaff upon the waves; the sails
Fly, rent like webs of gossamer; the masts
Are snapped asunder; downward from the decks,

Downward are slung, into the fathomless gulf,
Their cruel engines; and their hosts, arrayed
In trappings of the battle-field, are whelmed
By whirlpools, or dashed dead upon the rocks.
Then stand the nations still with awe, and pause,
A moment, from the bloody work of war.

These restless surges eat away the shores
Of earth's old continents; the fertile plain
Welters in shallows, headlands crumble down,
And the tide drifts the sea-sand in the streets
Of the drowned city. Thou, meanwhile, afar
In the green chambers of the middle sea,
Where broadest spread the waters and the line
Sinks deepest, while no eye beholds thy work.
Creator! thou dost teach the coral-worm
To lay his mighty reefs. From age to age,
He builds beneath the waters, till, at last,
His bulwarks overtop the brine, and check
The long wave rolling from the southern pole
To break upon Japan. Thou bidd'st the fires,
That smoulder under ocean, heave on high
The new-made mountains, and uplift their peaks,
A place of refuge for the storm-driven bird.
The birds and wafting billows plant the rifts
With herb and tree; sweet fountains gush; sweet airs
Ripple the living lakes that, fringed with flowers,
Are gathered in the hollows. Thou dost look
On thy creation and pronounce it good.
Its valleys, glorious in their summer green,
Praise thee in silent beauty, and its woods,
Swept by the murmuring winds of ocean, join
The murmuring shores in a perpetual hymn.

"The Land of Dreams" is a light and airy presentation of that realm of shadow. There are ten verses in the poem; we give the first two and the fifth:—

"A mighty realm is the Land of Dreams,
With steeps that hang in the twilight sky,
And weltering oceans and trailing streams,
That gleam where the dusky valleys lie.

"But over its shadowy border flow
Sweet rays from the world of endless morn,
And the nearer mountains catch the glow,
And flowers in the nearer fields are born.

. . . . . .

"Far off from those hills that shine with day
And fields that bloom in the heavenly gales,
The Land of Dreams goes stretching away
To dimmer mountains and darker vales."

"The Burial of Love" is so perfect of its kind that we transcribe the whole. Of this poem, and the preceding one, Stoddard wrote, classing them under the head of poems of imagination and fantasy, which, he says, "began with the rural song, if I may call it such, which the young poet addressed to the lady of his love; they culminated in 'The Land of Dreams' and 'The Burial of Love.' I know of nothing more poetical than these exquisite dreams within dreams, which haunt the memory with visions of loveliness. The genius of Bryant was as beautiful as it was magnificent."

THE BURIAL OF LOVE.

Two dark-eyed maids, at shut of day,
Sat where a river rolled away,
With calm sad brows and raven hair,
And one was pale and both were fair.

Bring flowers, they sang, bring flowers unblown,
Bring forest blooms of name unknown;
Bring budding sprays from wood and wild,
To strew the bier of Love, the child.

Close softly, fondly, while ye weep,
His eyes, that death may seem like sleep,
And fold his hands in sign of rest,
His waxen hands, across his breast.

And make his grave where violets hide,
Where star-flowers strew the rivulet's side,
And bluebirds in the misty spring
Of cloudless skies and summer sing.

Place near him, as ye lay him low,
His idle shafts, his loosened bow,
The silken fillet that around
His waggish eyes in sport he wound.

But we shall mourn him long, and miss
His ready smile, his ready kiss,
The patter of his little feet,
Sweet frowns and stammered phrases sweet;

And graver looks, serene and high,
A light of heaven in that young eye,
All these shall haunt us till the heart
Shall ache and ache—and tears will start.

The bow, the band shall fall to dust,
The shining arrows waste with rust,
And all of love that earth can claim,
Be but a memory and a name.

Not thus his nobler part shall dwell
A prisoner in this narrow cell;
But he whom now we hide from men,
In the dark ground, shall live again.

Shall break these clods, a form of light,
With nobler mien and purer sight,
And in the eternal glory stand,
Highest and nearest God's right hand.

In the beautiful dirge-like poem which follows, how touching is his sorrow for the dead:—

THE MAY SUN SHEDS AN AMBER LIGHT.

The May sun sheds an amber light
On new-leaved woods and lawns between;
But she who, with a smile more bright,
Welcomed and watched the springing green,
Is in her grave,
Low in her grave.

The fair white blossoms of the wood
In groups beside the pathway stand;
But one, the gentle and the good,
Who cropped them with a fairer hand,
Is in her grave,
Low in her grave.

Upon the woodland's morning airs
The small birds' mingled notes are flung;
But she, whose voice, more sweet than theirs
Once bade me listen while they sung,
Is in her grave,
Low in her grave.

That music of the early year
Brings tears of anguish to my eyes;
My heart aches when the flowers appear;
For then I think of her who lies
Within her grave,
Low in her grave.

We quote the poem which Halleck admired so much, that he wrote it out and committed it to memory. From beginning to end, including the quaint allusion to himself, it is lovely, and fragrant as the white and rosy blossoms:—

THE PLANTING OF THE APPLE-TREE.

Come, let us plant the apple-tree,
Cleave the tough greensward with the spade;
Wide let its hollow bed be made;
There gently lay the roots, and there

Sift the dark mould with kindly care,
And press it o'er them tenderly,
As, round from the sleeping infant's feet
We softly fold the cradle-sheet;
So plant we the apple-tree.

What plant we in this apple-tree?
Buds, which the breath of summer days
Shall lengthen into leafy sprays;
Boughs where the thrush, with crimson breast,
Shall haunt and sing and hide her nest
We plant, upon the sunny lea,
A shadow for the noontide hour,
A shelter from the summer shower,
When we plant the apple-tree.

What plant we in this apple-tree?
Sweets for a hundred flowery springs
To load the May-wind's restless wings,
When, from the orchard-row he pours
Its fragrance through our open doors;
A world of blossoms for the bee,
Flowers for the sick girl's silent room,
For the glad infant sprigs of bloom,
We plant with the apple-tree.

What plant we in this apple-tree?
Fruits that shall swell in sunny June,
And redden in the August noon,
And drop, when gentle airs come by,
That fan the blue September sky,
While children come, with cries of glee,
And seek them where the fragrant grass
Betrays their bed to those who pass,
At the foot of the apple-tree.

And when, above this apple-tree,
The winter stars are quivering bright,
And winds go howling through the night,
Girls, whose young eyes o'erflow with mirth,
Shall peel its fruit by cottage-hearth,

And guests in prouder homes shall see
Heaped with the grape of Cintra's vine
And golden orange of the line,
The fruit of the apple-tree.

The fruitage of this apple-tree
Winds and our flag of stripe and star
Shall bear to coasts that lie afar,
Where men shall wonder at the view
And ask in what fair groves they grew;
And sojourners beyond the sea
Shall think of childhood's careless day,
And long, long hours of summer play,
In the shade of the apple-tree.

Each year shall give this apple-tree
A broader flush of roseate bloom,
A deeper maze of verdurous gloom,
And loosen, when the frost-clouds lower,
The crisp-brown leaves in thicker shower;
The years shall come and pass, but we
Shall hear no longer, where we lie,
The summer's songs, the autumn's sigh,
In the boughs of the apple-tree.

And time shall waste this apple-tree.
Oh, when its aged branches throw
Thin shadows on the ground below,
Shall fraud and force and iron will
Oppress the weak and helpless still?
What shall the tasks of mercy be,
Amid the toils, the strifes, the tears
Of those who live when length of years
Is wasting this little apple-tree?

"Who planted this old apple-tree?"
The children of that distant day
Thus to some aged man shall say;
And, gazing on its mossy stem,
The gray-haired man shall answer them:

"A poet of the land was he,
Born in the rude but good old times;
'Tis said he made some quaint old rhymes,
On planting the apple-tree."

In "The Snow-shower," he personifies the snow-flakes, actually investing them with a reflection of human interest; and note, how admirably, in the same way, he succeeds in awakening sympathy for the brook, in

THE WIND AND STREAM.

A brook came stealing from the ground;
You scarcely saw its silvery gleam
Among the herbs that hung around
The borders of that winding stream,
The pretty stream, the placid stream,
The softly-gliding, bashful stream.

A breeze came wandering from the sky,
Light as the whispers of a dream;
He put the o'erhanging grasses by,
And softly stooped to kiss the stream,
The pretty stream, the flattered stream,
The shy, yet unreluctant stream.

The water, as the wind passed o'er,
Shot upward many a glancing beam,
Dimpled and quivered more and more,
And tripped along, a livelier stream,
The flattered stream, the simpering stream,
The fond, delighted, silly stream.

Away the airy wanderer flew
To where the fields with blossoms teem,
To sparkling springs and rivers blue,
And left alone that little stream,
The flattered stream, the cheated stream,
The sad, forsaken, lonely stream.

That careless wind came never back;
He wanders yet the fields, I deem,
But, on its melancholy track,
Complaining went that little stream,
The cheated stream, the hopeless stream,
The ever-murmuring, mourning stream.

Richard H. Dana, in a letter to a friend, written on August 9, 1866, says, after a touching allusion to Mrs. Bryant's death:—

"I do not know what it is that should bring to mind that most exquisite of exquisite little things, 'The Wind and the Stream,' in his *Thirty Poems*. What a dear little child he makes of it, so happy in its child-like, flattered vanity—all so pretty; and then its little heart broken that it is so deserted —left all alone. What a *heart* for nature must the man have who could write that!"

Stedman describes the following well-known sprightly lines, addressed to the *Rice Troopial*, familiarly called, throughout the greater part of America, the *Bob-o-Link*, as being "full of bird-music and fancy:"—

ROBERT OF LINCOLN.

Merrily swinging on brier and weed,
Near to the nest of his little dame,
Over the mountain-side or mead,
Robert of Lincoln is telling his name:
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;
Snug and safe is that nest of ours,
Hidden among the summer flowers.
Chee, chee, chee.

Robert of Lincoln is gaily drest,
Wearing a bright black wedding-coat;
White are his shoulders and white his crest,
Hear him call in his merry note:
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;

Look, what a nice new coat is mine,
Sure there was never a bird so fine.
Chee, chee, chee.

Robert of Lincoln's Quaker wife,
Pretty and quiet, with plain brown wings,
Passing at home a patient life,
Broods in the grass while her husband sings:
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;
Brood, kind creature; you need not fear
Thieves and robbers while I am here.
Chee, chee, chee.

Modest and shy as a nun is she;
One weak chirp is her only note.
Braggart and prince of braggarts is he,
Pouring boasts from his little throat;
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link.
Spink, spank, spink;
Never was I afraid of man;
Catch me, cowardly knaves, if you can!
Chee, chee, chee.

Six white eggs on a bed of hay,
Flecked with purple, a pretty sight!
There as the mother sits all day,
Robert is singing with all his might:
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;
Nice good wife, that never goes out,
Keeping house while I frolic about.
Chee, chee, chee.

Soon as the little ones chip the shell
Six little mouths are open for food;
Robert of Lincoln bestirs him well,
Gathering seeds for the hungry brood.
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;

This new life is likely to be
Hard for a gay young fellow like me.
Chee, chee, chee.

Robert of Lincoln at length is made
Sober with work, and silent with care;
Off is his holiday garment laid,
Half forgotten that merry air:
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;
Nobody knows but my mate and I
Where our nest and our nestlings lie.
Chee, chee, chee.

Summer wanes; the children are grown;
Fun and frolic no more he knows;
Robert of Lincoln's a humdrum crone;
Off he flies, and we sing as he goes:
Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;
When you can pipe that merry old strain,
Robert of Lincoln, come back again.
Chee, chee, chee.

Bryant delights to make use of the wide-spreading landscape, and the special features of the scenery, as a background for his figures. He does so, for example, in the patriotic lyric "Seventy-six," and in his "Indian Story," where the mode of treatment gives an open-air feeling to his poetry, at once realistic and expansive; for, in his very truthful delineations of American scenery, Bryant was at once minute and comprehensive.

Several of his poems, such as "The Song of the Sower," "The Path;" two fairy stories,—"Sella" and "The Little People of the Snow," and "The Day-Dream," written in his latter years—light, airy, and imaginative—are marked by his best characteristics, and show no diminution of poetical power.

From "Sella," a long legend of the days of old, we quote what that maiden sees when transported by her magic slippers to the ocean depths:—

"And then we wandered off amid the groves
Of coral, loftier than the growths of earth:
The mightiest cedar lifts no trunk like theirs,
So huge, so high toward heaven, nor overhangs
Alleys and bowers so dim. We moved between
Pinnacles of black rock, which, from beneath
Molten by inner fires,—so said my guide,—
Gushed long ago into the hissing brine,
That quenched and hardened them; and now they stand
Motionless in the currents of the sea
That part and flow around them. As we went,
We looked into the hollows of the abyss
To which the never-resting waters sweep
The skeletons of sharks, the long white spines
Of narwhal and of dolphin, bones of men
Shipwrecked, and mighty ribs of foundered barks.
Down the blue pits we looked, and hastened on.

"But beautiful the fountains of the sea
Sprang upwards from its bed: the silvery jets
Shot branching far into the azure brine;
And where they mingled with it, the great deep
Quivered and shook as shakes the glimmering air
Above a furnace. So we wandered through
The mighty world of waters, till at length
I wearied of its wonders, and my heart
Began to yearn for my dear mountain-home.
I prayed my gentle guide to lead me back
To the upper air. 'A glorious realm,' I said,
'Is this thou openest to me; but I stray
Bewildered in its vastness: these strange sights
And this strange light oppress me. I must see
The faces that I love, or I shall die.'"

In "The Little People of the Snow," which is also

an old-world story, he thus describes what Eva, a child of the Caucasus, sees—when, enticed far away over the glistening snows by a fairy maiden, she looks in through the ice-windows of the frost-palace where the little people are holding their revels, but into which palace, she, a mortal, cannot enter:—

"And in that hall a joyous multitude
Of these by whom its glistening walls were reared
Whirled in a merry dance to silvery sounds,
That rang from cymbals of transparent ice,
And ice-cups, quivering to the skilful touch
Of little fingers. Round and round they flew,
As when in spring, about a chimney-top,
A cloud of twittering swallows, just returned,
Wheel round and round, and turn and wheel again,
Unwinding their swift track. So rapidly
Flowed the meandering stream of that fair dance
Beneath that dome of light. Bright eyes that looked
From under lily-brows, and gauzy scarfs
Sparkling like snow-wreaths in the early sun,
Shot by the window in their mazy whirl."

Eva, chilled by exposure to the cold, sinks on the snow-drift, and

"The hues of life
Fade from the fair smooth brow and rounded cheek
As fades the crimson from a morning cloud."

The cottagers, mourning over the dead child, dig a grave for her beneath the snow, and, in perfect keeping with the fairy story, the little folks also come, and mourn too:—

"A thousand slender voices round,
Like echoes softly flung from rock and hill,
Took up the strain, and all the hollow air
Seemed mourning for the dead; for on that day
The Little People of the Snow had come

From mountain-peak and cloud and icy hall
To Eva's burial."

. . . . . .

"The little grave was closed; the funeral-train
Departed; winter wore away; the Spring
Steeped, with her quickening rains, the violet-tufts,
By fond hands planted where the maiden slept.
But, after Eva's burial, never more
The Little People of the Snow were seen
By human eye, nor ever human ear
Heard from their lips articulate speech again;
For a decree went forth to cut them off,
Forever, from communion with mankind.
The winter-clouds, along the mountain-side,
Rolled downward toward the vale, but no fair form
Leaned from their folds, and, in the icy glens,
And aged woods, under snow-loaded pines,
Where once they made their haunts, was emptiness.
"But ever, when the wintry days drew near,
Around that little grave, in the long night,
Frost-wreaths were laid and tufts of silvery rime
In shape like blades and blossoms of the field,
As one would scatter flowers upon a bier."

In the columns of the *Post*, in his own dignified and seemingly calm, yet only restrained and pent-up way, Bryant had long fought against slavery; for he knew that the accursed system was, already, one way or another, certainly doomed. When, at length, its death-blow came, and the right prevailed, he sang the following mighty song of deliverance and triumph, from the very depths of his loving, large, and intensely human heart:—

THE DEATH OF SLAVERY.

O thou great Wrong, that, through the slow-paced years,
Didst hold thy millions fettered, and didst wield
The scourge that drove the labourer to the field,

And turn a stony gaze on human tears,
Thy cruel reign is o'er;
The bondmen crouch no more
In terror at the menace of thine eye;
For He who marks the bounds of guilty power,
Long-suffering, hath heard the captive's cry,
And touched his shackles at the appointed hour,
And lo! they fall, and he whose limbs they galled
Stands in his native manhood, disenthralled.

A shout of joy from the redeemed is sent;
Ten thousand hamlets swell the hymn of thanks;
Our rivers roll exulting, and their banks
Send up hosannas to the firmament!
Fields where the bondman's toil
No more shall trench the soil,
Seem now to bask in a serener day;
The meadow-birds sing sweeter, and the airs
Of heaven with more caressing softness play,
Welcoming man to liberty like theirs.
A glory clothes the land from sea to sea,
For the great land and all its coasts are free.

Within that land wert thou enthroned of late,
And they by whom the nation's laws were made,
And they who filled its judgment-seats obeyed
Thy mandate, rigid as the will of Fate.
Fierce men at thy right hand,
With gesture of command,
Gave forth the word that none might dare gainsay;
And grave and reverend ones, who loved thee not,
Shrank from thy presence, and in blank dismay
Choked down, unuttered, the rebellious thought;
While meaner cowards, mingling with the train,
Proved, from the book of God, thy right to reign.

Great as thou wert, and feared from shore to shore,
The wrath of Heaven o'ertook thee in thy pride;
Thou sitt'st a ghastly shadow; by thy side

Thy once strong arms hang nerveless evermore.
And they who quailed but now
Before thy lowering brow,
Devote thy memory to scorn and shame,
And scoff at the pale, powerless thing thou art.
And they who ruled in thine imperial name,
Subdued, and standing sullenly apart,
Scowl at the hands that overthrew thy reign,
And shattered at a blow the prisoner's chain.

Well was thy doom deserved; thou didst not spare
Life's tenderest ties, but cruelly didst part
Husband and wife, and from the mother's heart
Didst wrest her children, deaf to shriek and prayer;
Thy inner lair became
The haunt of guilty shame;
Thy lash dropped blood; the murderer, at thy side,
Showed his red hands, nor feared the vengeance due.
Thou didst sow earth with crimes, and, far and wide,
A harvest of uncounted miseries grew,
Until the measure of thy sins at last
Was full, and then the avenging bolt was cast!

Go now, accursed of God, and take thy place
With hateful memories of the elder time,
With many a wasting plague, and nameless crime,
And bloody war that thinned the human race;
With the Black Death, whose way
Through wailing cities lay,
Worship of Moloch, tyrannies that built
The Pyramids, and cruel creeds that taught
To avenge a fancied guilt by deeper guilt—
Death at the stake to those that held them not.
Lo! the foul phantoms, silent in the gloom
Of the flown ages, part to yield thee room.

I see the better years that hasten by
Carry thee back into that shadowy past,
Where, in the dusty spaces, void and vast,

The graves of those whom thou hast murdered lie.
The slave-pen, through whose door
Thy victims pass no more,
Is there, and there shall the grim block remain
At which the slave was sold; while at thy feet
Scourges and engines of restraint and pain
Moulder and rust by thine eternal seat.
There, mid the symbols that proclaim thy crimes,
Dwell thou, a warning to the coming times.
May, 1866.

His last poem, of any great length, was "The Flood of Years." Written in the poet's eighty-second year, and full of "the still sad music of humanity," pure, calm, meditative, and trustful in tone, it reminds us of his "Thanatopsis," of 1812, "The Ages," of 1821, and "Among the Trees," of 1874. The essential ideas, in all these poems, point in the same direction, while, in setting and finish, if there be any difference, the last is even finer than his earlier work. The poem originally appeared in *Scribner's Magazine;* then it was published by itself as an illustrated gift-book; and, afterwards, it was included in Appleton's edition of Bryant's poems:—

THE FLOOD OF YEARS.

"A Mighty Hand, from an exhaustless urn
Pours forth the never-ending Flood of Years
Among the nations. How the rushing waves
Bear all before them! On their foremost edge,
And there alone, is Life; the Present there
Tosses and foams and fills the air with roar
Of mingled noises. There are they who toil,
And they who strive, and they who feast, and they
Who hurry to and fro. The sturdy hind—
Woodman and delver with the spade—are there,
And busy artisan beside his bench,
And pallid student with his written roll.

A moment on the mounting billow seen—
The flood sweeps over them and they are gone.
There groups of revellers, whose brows are twined
With roses, ride the topmast swell awhile,
And as they raise their flowing cups to touch
The clinking brim to brim, are whirled beneath
The waves and disappear. I hear the jar
Of beaten drums, and thunders that break forth
From cannon, where the advancing billow sends
Up to the sight long files of armed men,
That hurry to the charge through flame and smoke.
The torrent bears them under, whelmed and hid,
Slayer and slain, in heaps of bloody foam.
Down go the steed and rider; the plumed chief
Sinks with his followers; the head that wears
The imperial diadem goes down beside
The felon's with cropped ear and branded cheek.
A funeral train—the torrent sweeps away
Bearers and bier and mourners. . . . .
Lo, next, a kneeling crowd and one who spreads
The hands in prayer; the engulfing wave o'ertakes
And swallows them and him. A sculptor wields
The chisel, and the stricken marble grows
To beauty; at his easel, eager-eyed,
A painter stands, and sunshine, at his touch,
Gathers upon the canvas, and life glows;
A poet, as he paces to and fro,
Murmurs his sounding line. Awhile they ride
The advancing billow, till its tossing crest
Strikes them and flings them under while their tasks
Are yet unfinished. See a mother smile
On her young babe that smiles to her again—
The torrent wrests it from her arms; she shrieks,
And weeps, and midst her tears is carried down.
A beam like that of moonlight turns the spray
To glistening pearls; two lovers, hand in hand,
Rise on the billowy swell and fondly look
Into each other's eyes. The rushing flood

Flings them apart; the youth goes down; the maid,
With hands outstretched in vain and streaming eyes,
Waits for the next high wave to follow him.
An aged man succeeds; his bending form
Sinks slowly; mingling with the sullen stream
Gleam the white locks and then are seen no more.
Lo, wider grows the stream; a sea-like flood
Saps earth's walled cities; massive palaces
Crumble before it; fortresses and towers
Dissolve in the swift waters; populous realms,
Swept by the torrent, see their ancient tribes
Engulfed and lost, their very languages
Stifled and never to be uttered more. . . . .
Sadly I turn, and look before, where yet
The Flood must pass, and I behold a mist
Where swarm dissolving forms, the brood of Hope,
Divinely fair, that rest on banks of flowers
Or wander among rainbows, fading soon
And reappearing, haply giving place
To shapes of grisly aspect, such as Fear
Moulds from the idle air; where serpents lift
The head to strike, and skeletons stretch forth
The bony arm in menace. Further on
A belt of darkness seems to bar the way,
Long, low and distant, where the Life that Is
Touches the Life to Come. The Flood of Years
Rolls toward it, nearer and nearer. It must pass
That dismal barrier. What is there beyond?
Hear what the wise and good have said. Beyond
That belt of darkness still the years roll on
More gently, but with not less mighty sweep.
They gather up again and softly bear
All the sweet lives that late were overwhelmed
And lost to sight—all that in them was good,
Noble, and truly great and worthy of love—
The lives of infants and ingenuous youths,
Sages and saintly women who have made
Their households happy—all are raised and borne

By that great current on its onward sweep,
Wandering and rippling with caressing waves
Around green islands, fragrant with the breath
Of flowers that never wither. So they pass,
From stage to stage, along the shining course
Of that fair river broadening like a sea.
As its smooth eddies curl along their way,
They bring old friends together; hands are clasped
In joy unspeakable; the mother's arms
Again are folded round the child she loved
And lost. Old sorrows are forgotten now,
Or but remembered to make sweet the hour
That overpays them; wounded hearts that bled
Or broke are healed for ever. In the room
Of this grief-shadowed Present there shall be
A Present in whose reign no grief shall gnaw
The heart, and never shall a tender tie
Be broken in whose reign the eternal Change
That waits on growth and action shall proceed
With everlasting Concord hand in hand.

"A gentleman who had been recently bereaved was so struck by the unquestioning faith in immortality expressed in the concluding lines of this poem that he wrote to the poet, asking him if they represented his own belief. Mr. Bryant answered him in the following note, dated Cummington, August 10th, 1876:—

"'Certainly, I believe all that is said in the lines you have quoted. If I had not I could not have written them. I believe in the everlasting life of the soul; and it seems to me that immortality would be but an imperfect gift without the recognition in the life to come of those who are dear to us here.'"

"Sixty years elapsed between his 'Thanatopsis' and his 'Flood of Years,' and in the last he is scarcely less the perfect poet than in the first. Indeed, the river of

song still flows grandly and majestically, gathering in grandeur and force, as it approaches the eternal sea."

It is not generally known that Bryant has written a number of distinctly Christian hymns. A few are published along with his poems; but a small volume, containing twenty-nine others, and to which we have already alluded, was printed some years ago for private circulation. One, called "Blessed are they that Mourn," is sung by many who may be unacquainted with the authorship. It begins thus,—

"Oh, deem not they are blest alone,
Whose days a peaceful tenor keep;
The Power who pities man, hath shown
A blessing for the eyes that weep.

"The light of smiles shall fill again
The lids that overflow with tears;
And weary hours of woe and pain
Are promises of happier years.

"There is a day of sunny rest
For every dark and troubled night;
And grief may hide an evening guest,
But joy shall come with early light."

. . . . . .

Lately, at the closing lecture of a course by Dr. Ray Palmer, at Union Theological Seminary, the venerable Bryant, on being introduced to the audience, after alluding to the grand contributions which the lecturer had made to the hymnology of the world, and especially to the hymn, "My faith looks up to Thee," said: "The philosophy of hymns is this: our thoughts become impressive as they are expressed in well-chosen phrases, and uttered in rhythm and rhyme. The power to affect other minds is augmented by the sympathetic tones of the

human voice in reading or reciting; and when musical cadence and melody are added, and the language of music is associated with words, we have, as a product, the well-known soothing and inspiring effect of singing hymns." The poet admiringly repeated Cowper's beautiful hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way," then a number of others which were also his favourites, and concluded with Henry Kirke White's "Star of Bethlehem."

We present our readers with one of Bryant's hymns, which ought to find a place in our collections. The theme is "The Supremacy of Christ."

"O North, with all thy vales of green;
O South, with all thy palms!
From peopled towns and fields between,
Uplift the voice of psalms.
Raise, ancient East! the anthem high,
And let the youthful West reply.

"Lo! in the clouds of heaven appears
God's well-belovèd Son:
He brings a train of brighter years;
His kingdom is begun:
He comes a guilty world to bless
With mercy, truth, and righteousness.

"O Father! haste the promised hour,
When at His feet shall lie
All rule, authority, and power,
Beneath the ample sky:
When He shall reign from pole to pole,
The Lord of every human soul:

"When all shall heed the words He said,
Amid their daily cares,
And by the loving life He led,
Shall strive to pattern theirs;
And He who conquered Death shall win
The mightier conquest over Sin."

Here are two stanzas of a hymn founded on the saying of Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the marriage in Cana of Galilee:—

"Whate'er He bids, observe and do;
Such be the law that we obey,
And greater wonders men shall view
Than that of Cana's bridal day.

"The flinty heart with love shall beat,
The chains shall fall from passion's slave,
The proud shall sit at Jesus' feet,
And learn the truths that bless and save."

From the many selections already given, the reader will, now, in some degree, be able to form for himself an estimate of Bryant as a poet—the height of which estimate will pretty accurately gauge his own literary culture, critical acumen, and refined maturity of judgment.

Bryant himself, in these pages, has already told us his idea of what poetry ought to be, both in his admirable prose introduction to the *Library of Poetry and Song*, and in his poem entitled "The Poet;" and how well he succeeded in realizing his ideal may be gathered from the high admiration with which he is regarded by those who are best able to judge.

Personally, the venerable poet has not inaptly been said to present the very semblance of the legendary Bard of Gray:—

"The poet stood
(Loose his beard and hoary hair
Streamed, like a meteor, to the troubled air),
And with a master's hand and prophet's fire,
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre!"

Bryant, never vague in his descriptions, is always strictly and marvellously exact. Everything he de-

scribes he has seen or felt for himself. When he communes with Nature in America, it is distinctively American Nature.

His reputation as a poet is safe from the mere fluctuating fashions of critical opinion; for it rests on perduring truth, and is of the things "that cannot be shaken;" although, for the full appreciation of his verse, a certain refinement and culture, with moral purity and elevation, are requisite.

With keen, observant eye, he has portrayed Nature accurately and minutely, investing it with sympathetic spirit-meanings, projected from his own soul, thus forming a true chord in the harmonic ratios of the universe.

CHAPTER XIII.

1876–1878: Youth in Old Age—Careful Habits—Wide Sympathies—Independent Spirit—The Fine Arts—Letter to Williams College—Firm Faith—Washington Ode—Science and Religion—Edits Shakspere.

Bryant Hale and Fresh at Eighty—Self-Restraint—Diet, Sleep, and Exercise—His whole Life a Training—Wide Sympathies—Shuns Notoriety—Editorial Desk—Independent Spirit—Talked of for President—Enthusiasm and Shyness—His Interest in the Fine Arts—Williams College and Berkshire proud of Him—Beautiful Letter to the *Alumni* of Williams—Bryant a Religious Man—His Firm Faith—Story Dinner—Washington Ode—Decoration Day—Letter on Science and Religion—With Duychinck Edits Shakspere—Writes Introduction to Alden's *Thoughts on Religion*, and *Studies of Bryant*—Sure Ground of Hope.

Bryant, when over fourscore, was hale and fresh, and possessed "a wonderful balance of faculties in a marvellously harmonious frame."

Of the Nestor of American poets it was said in 1876:—

"We suppose, he might be regarded as an old man, but

there is really nothing old about him. The frosts and snows of winter have not touched and chilled him, but, instead, the sunshine of two-and-eighty summers has bathed his head, and brightened his heart, and rippled through his voice of song. You would hardly suppose he had reached threescore and ten, his figure is so erect and his step is so elastic. He is fond of exercise, and walks down regularly every morning to his *Evening Post*, as he himself facetiously puts it, with a merry twinkle in his eye. He is a great worker, and the amount of literary and journalistic labour he still performs would appal many of our more youthful scribblers."

He could outwalk middle-aged men. "His spirit," says Bellows, "wore a light and lithe vesture of clay, that never burdened him. His senses were perfect at fourscore. His eyes needed no glasses: his hearing was exquisitely fine. His alertness was the wonder of his contemporaries. . . . Regular in all his habits, he retained his youth almost to the last; . . . and the last lustre of his long and busy life showed not only no senility or decline in artistic skill, but no decrease in intellectual or physical endurance."

He preserved his vigour of body and mind, by temperate self-restraint, good sense, and a strict observance of the laws of health—both in regard to proper sanitary arrangements, and due attention to diet, sleep, and exercise.

In a letter to Joseph H. Richards, dated March 30th, 1871, he himself gave the following interesting particulars of his uncommonly simple and sensible mode of life:—

"My dear Sir,—I promised some time since to give you some account of my habits of life, so far at least as regards diet, exercise, and occupation. I am not sure that it will be of any use to you, although the system which I have for many years observed seems to answer my purpose very well. I have reached a pretty advanced period of life without the usual infirmities of old age, and, with my strength, activity, and

bodily faculties generally in pretty good preservation. How far this may be the effect of my way of life, adopted long ago, and steadily adhered to, is perhaps uncertain.

"I rise early—at this time of the year, about half-past five; in summer, half an hour, or even an hour, earlier. Immediately, with very little encumbrance of clothing, I begin a series of exercises, for the most part designed to expand the chest, and, at the same time, call into action all the muscles and articulations of the body. These are performed with dumb-bells—the very lightest—covered with flannel, with a pole, a horizontal bar, and a light chair swung round my head. After a full hour, and sometimes more, passed in this manner, I bathe from head to foot. When at my place in the country I sometimes shorten my exercises in the chamber, and, going out, occupy myself for half an hour or more in some work which requires brisk exercise. After my bath, if breakfast be not ready, I sit down to my studies until I am called.

"My breakfast is a simple one—hominy and milk, or, in place of hominy, brown bread or oatmeal, or wheaten grits, and, in the season, baked sweet apples. Buckwheat cakes I do not decline, nor any other article of vegetable food; but animal food I never take at breakfast. Tea and coffee I never touch at any time. Sometimes I take a cup of chocolate, which has no narcotic effect, and agrees with me very well. At breakfast I often eat fruit, either in its natural state or freshly stewed.

"After breakfast I occupy myself for a while with my studies; and then, when in town, I walk down to the office of the *Evening Post*, nearly three miles distant, and, after about three hours, return, always walking, whatever be the weather or the state of the streets. In the country, I am engaged in my literary tasks till a feeling of weariness drives me out into the open air; and I go upon my farm, or into the garden and prune the fruit-trees, or perform some other work about them which they need, and then go back to my books. I do not often drive out, preferring to walk.

"In the country, I dine early; and it is only at that meal

that I take either meat or fish, and of these but a moderate quantity, making my dinner mostly of vegetables. At the meal which is called tea I only take a little bread and butter, with fruit if it be on the table. In town, where I dine later, I make but two meals a day. Fruit makes a considerable part of my diet, and I eat it at almost any hour of the day without inconvenience. My drink is water; yet I sometimes, though rarely, take a glass of wine. I am a natural temperance man, finding myself rather confused than exhilarated by wine. I never meddle with tobacco, except to quarrel with its use.

"That I may rise early, I, of course go to bed early—in town, as early as ten; in the country, somewhat earlier.

"For many years, I have avoided in the evening every kind of literary occupation which tasks the faculties, such as composition—even to the writing of letters—for the reason that it excites the nervous system, and prevents sound sleep. My brother told me, not long since, that he had seen in a Chicago newspaper, and several other Western journals, a paragraph in which it was said that I am in the habit of taking quinine as a stimulant; that I have depended upon the excitement it produces in writing my verses; and that, in consequence of using it in that way, I had become as deaf as a post. As to my deafness, you know that to be false; and the rest of the story is equally so. I abominate all drugs and narcotics, and have always carefully avoided everything which spurs nature to exertions which it would not otherwise make. Even with my food I do not take the usual condiments, such as pepper and the like.—I am, sir, truly yours, W. C. Bryant."

Bryant thus was one of the most active old men ever known; and, living leisurely, he found time for every duty. His life was, in fact, one long course of training; and those who were well acquainted with him say—that, but for the accident which caused his death, he would probably have become a veritable centenarian.

John Bigelow, in his admirable address before the Century Club, said:—

"I am warranted in saying that, until the distressing accident which terminated his days, he was never disabled by sickness within the memory of any person now living.

"'In years he seemed, but not impaired by years.'

"Meeting him some years ago, and after a somewhat prolonged separation, I asked him particularly about his health. He said it was so perfect he hardly dared to speak of it. He was not conscious from one week to another, he said, of a physical sensation that he would have different; and was forgetting that he was liable to disease and decay. . . . Not many weeks before his death, and when recovering from a slight indisposition which he had been describing to me (he was then approaching his eighty-fourth year), I said, 'I presume you have reduced your allowance of morning gymnastics.' 'Not the width of your thumb nail,' was his prompt reply. 'What!' said I, 'do you manage to still put in your hour and a half every morning?' 'Yes,' he replied, 'and sometimes more; frequently more.' This may seem a trifling incident to enumerate among the memorabilia of a notable man. I regard it as a signal triumph of character."

His family physician and friend, Dr. John F. Gray, writes:—"Mr. Bryant owed his long life to an exceedingly tenacious and tough constitution and very prudent living. I always found him an early riser. Although he was slight of body and limb, he seemed to me unconscious of fatigue, and he would walk many a stronger man off his legs. He did not walk rapidly, but seemed as wiry as an Indian."

Bryant's simplicity, honesty, genuine kindliness, and freshness of heart, were notable traits. Ever conscious of a strict sense of right, duty, and responsibility, devolving upon himself, he was tolerant and kindly to others, and his instinctive sympathy and interest in all forms of human joy and suffering were broad and deep. Always of a modest, retiring disposition, he never quite over-

came his shrinking timidity from notoriety of any kind—indeed, it amounted to bashfulness; and, latterly, on public occasions, when, as the fittest man, he was frequently called to the front, the seemingly calm, unperturbed air with which he so well and nobly fulfilled the duties demanded of him, instead of arising from vertebrate strength in that direction, was only an outwardly assumed hardness, like the shell of the lobster, in order to crust over his innate, oversensitive, shrinking, personal modesty and unconquerable shyness. An old acquaintance has recorded of him:—

"His conversation was always simple, natural, and interesting; for he never spoke unless he had something to say. He was not always disposed to talk. He seemed to think with Buckminster, that no friends are really intimate till they can, at times, enjoy each other's society in silence. He never introduced a topic unsuited to the mental condition of those present. He never, by word or act, gave any indication that he was conscious of being a person of distinction. Increased intimacy with him only gave a deeper impression of his genuine modesty. But his modesty was not diffidence, for he had a just estimate of his powers."

In political strife, for what he thought right, he was ever foremost in the fight; but the impersonality of the editorial desk humoured his shy feeling, and afforded him all the barricade he required, so that, ensconsed behind it, he fought on, and was bold as a lion.

In advocating measures, he never had any personal aims to serve; and so he maintained his spirit of independence to the last. He systematically declined prizes of office when actually placed in his offer, and set aside others to which, had he been so minded, he could readily have attained by simply giving his silent assent.

A few years back (in 1872), when Grant and Greeley were candidates for the presidency, Bryant's name was

spontaneously and favourably mentioned by the press as a fitting third candidate. The proposition was at once everywhere so well received, that the poet, to whom it was distasteful as well as impracticable, compelled to take notice of the matter, addressed the following characteristic card to the public:—

"Certain journals of this city have lately spoken of me as one ambitious of being nominated as a candidate for the presidency of the United States. The idea is absurd enough, not only on account of my advanced age, but of my unfitness in various respects for the labour of so eminent a post. I do not, however, object to the discussion of my deficiencies on any other ground than that it is altogether superfluous, since it is impossible that I should receive any formal nomination, and equally impossible, if it were offered, that I should commit the folly of accepting it. WILLIAM C. BRYANT.

"New York, July 8, 1872."

Bryant had stood by Lincoln during his whole career, and he also supported Grant.

He ever spoke in a kindly tone of his contemporaries, more especially of his brother poets. The following anecdote, told by an editorial associate, finely brings out Bryant's shy modesty—a trait to which we have frequently alluded. His remark about the wood-work of the hoist, abruptly changing the subject, is charmingly natural, and so like him:—

"His quotations in conversation were from a great variety of sources, but the most extensive one I ever heard him make was from Cowley, of whose poetry Mr. Bryant made a special study during the latter part of his life. I do not remember now what the occasion was or from what poem he quoted, but I shall never forget the effect it produced. He was standing by a form around which the printers were gathered, hastily getting it ready for the press. Some casual word was spoken

which suggested the lines, and Mr. Bryant, locking his hands before him, repeated the verse with wonderful force and tenderness, causing the printers, hurried as they were, to pause and listen. As he finished he turned to the wood-work around the elevator, and, tapping it, said, 'There is very little wood there to make trouble in case of fire.' There was a look of almost boyish abashment in his face as he recovered from the fine enthusiasm."

His mind, well stored with lore of all kinds, and his memory excellent, he could repeat long passages from the poets whom he admired, whether English or foreign. The following incident is related of him and Mr. John C. Zachos, the curator of the Cooper Institute:—

"Not long before his death, Bryant was present at a social gathering of literary men at the house of Peter Cooper, when the conversation fell upon the capacity of various languages to express the sense by the sound. Mr. Zachos advocated the sonorous qualities of the modern Greek, while Bryant thought that the Italian possessed more illustrative power than any other language. In order to test the comparative merits of the two languages, he proposed, that, if Mr. Zachos would recite something in modern Greek, he would repeat a selection in Italian. The proposition was at once carried out; and Bryant chose a passage from Dante, and recited it with a power and enthusiasm and fire which surprised his audience. 'It was a fine sight, and one to be remembered,' said Mr. Zachos: 'the white-haired old man, wrapt up in the beauty of what he was reciting, and almost oblivious of his surroundings, made the scene an impressive one. Aside from the beauty of the sight, it was a marvellous instance of the influence which the genius of song of any nationality had over the aged poet, enabling him to overcome for the time his habitual serenity.'"

Of Bryant's choice of homes, with their outward surroundings and interior aspects, we have already spoken as indicating his refined and artistic taste.

His life-long interest in the fine arts, and his close friendship with distinguished artists, was evidenced by his honoured place in the Century Club, of which, it is said, he was the chief founder, and of which he was president when he died.[1]

He was ever held in high respect and admiration in his native state of Massachusetts; and the writer, during a ten months' sojourn at Williamstown, Berkshire County, in 1874–5, found that everybody there knew, and was proud of the fact, that the great poet and journalist had in youthful days been a student in Williams College, and that he still visited and continued to manifest a warm interest in his *alma mater*. In this connection we quote from a tribute subsequently paid to his memory by the Rev. Mr. Munger, in a sermon on laying up treasure in heaven:—

"I have been unable, while bringing together these thoughts, to keep my mind from dwelling upon the death of the great man, who, while a loss to the nation, is peculiarly a loss to Berkshire Co. For here—not far from us—he was born. In the college near by he received in part his education. These mountains that rise about us awoke the poet's nature within him. The forests that clothe their sides are those of which he said that, 'The groves are God's first temples.' Their fallen leaves driven by the autumnal blast suggested that poem of sweetest sadness, 'The melancholy days are come.' By these road-sides spring the fringed gentian—

"'Blue, blue, as if the sky let fall
A flower from its cerulean wall'—

a poem sufficient to win immortality. Through these skies the waterfowl flew along its 'solitary way' that prompted the most perfect poem produced on this continent. It was nature

[1] A statue of Bryant, by J. S. Hartley, was presented to the Century Club in December, 1879; on which occasion addresses were delivered by Curtis and Osgood.—A. J. S.

as seen and felt in the 'visible forms' of these hills and woods and waters and skies, that furnished the framework of 'Thanatopsis,' the first American poem that gained foreign recognition, and one of the sublimest that ever came from the human mind, yet was the product of a boy of nineteen. Though his years have been spent elsewhere, and though the greater part of his labours were wrought in the metropolis, still Bryant belonged to this locality. The editor—the man of business—went to New York, but the poet remained in Berkshire. I could almost fancy, yesterday, that a sense of bereavement hung above these hills, and that the warm winds breathed dirge-like through the young leaves of the forest. Certainly, we have all remembered that he who put their suggestions into intellectual forms, and wrought their secret meanings into hymns of peace and trust, will never more behold them. They remain, but he who gathered them into the alembic of his thought, and gave them forth in forms of beauty and truth, has entered the world whose peace they continually foreshadowed to him. The life and character of Mr. Bryant aptly illustrate the subject of which I have spoken. More than almost any man I can now recall, he made every stage of his life a preparation for the stage to come. It was always on an ascending scale. Though he was most thoroughly in the world, he was not of it."

An old acquaintance thus speaks of a week Bryant spent in Berkshire; which visit was probably paid just the year before he died:—

"It was June, his favourite month. The weather was fine. Each day was spent on the hills or in the valleys. While passing from point to point he conversed freely; but while viewing the scenery he rarely spoke unless to direct my attention to some object of peculiar interest. The week was, to me, a series of lessons in the art of perceiving beauty. At the close of the week, he was pleased to say that he had never passed a more peaceful one. He manifested a pleasant interest in the domestic worship of the family, and subsequently alluded to

it in a letter as a source of spiritual profit. His life during that week was a beautiful poem. May not the remark be made with reference to his whole life?"

In December, 1877, scarcely seven months before his death, the veteran poet was invited by the *alumni* of Williams College to prepare and read a poem at their next Commencement Meeting, as he had done at Harvard in his young days, when he recited "The Ages." To this request, however, in a conscientious, friendly spirit, he now, in a beautiful letter, declined to accede—fearing that the students, as well as himself, might be disappointed with the degree of excellence he might attain, should the result, in any way, fall short of their expectations:—

"You ask me," said he, "for a few lines of verse to be read at your annual festival of the *alumni* at Williams College. I am ever ill at occasional verses. Such as it is, my vein is not of that sort. I find it difficult to satisfy myself. Besides, it is the December of life with me, I try to keep a few flowers in pots—mere remembrances of a more genial season which is now with the things of the past. If I have a carnation or two for Christmas, I think myself fortunate. You write as if I had nothing to do, in fulfilling your request, but to go out and gather under the hedges and by the brooks a bouquet of flowers that spring spontaneously, and throw it upon your table. If I am to try, what would you say, if it proved to be only a little bundle of devil-stalks and withered leaves, which my dim sight had mistaken for fresh, green sprays and blossoms? So I must excuse myself as well as I can, and content myself with wishing a very pleasant evening to the foster-children of old 'Williams' who meet on New Year's Day, and all manner of prosperity and honour to the excellent institution of learning in which they are nurtured."

To the gentleman who, after reading "The Flood of Years," wrote a letter of inquiry as to his faith in the

immortality of the soul, Bryant, as we have seen, had unfalteringly declared his unqualified belief in the great realities of religion. An editorial associate also tells us that, in talking over that subject, when Canon Farrar's *Eternal Hope* was published, Bryant said that he had fully satisfied himself, years ago, on the subject of a future life; that he had carefully gone over the whole ground, and his confidence could not be shaken. A reference to his own approaching end was made in precisely the same way as he would have referred to an approaching change from his city house to his Roslyn home; for he habitually contemplated death very much in that way. Imbued with the celestial graces of faith, hope, and charity, his pure, noble, and consistent life, as well as his writings, whether poetry or prose, all testify to his being, truly and essentially, a religious man.

Bryant says, in a letter written from Roslyn to General Wilson, near the close of the last winter of his life, and relating to an invitation to be his guest over-night, when in the city on the occasion of a dinner given to Story, of Rome, the American sculptor, who was then visiting his native land after an absence of twenty years:—

"I have your obliging note of the tenth of this month. In the fulfilment of an engagement which dates back several months, the Goethe Club is to give me what is called a reception on Tuesday evening (to-morrow). I have had my home in town put in order within a day or two, so that I can sleep there; but old age is so sensitive that I cannot be out two nights together without feeling it unpleasantly, and I cannot afford to be inattentive to such admonitions. I must, therefore, trust to the indulgence of your committee to excuse me from being present at the banquet, though I consent that my name may appear in the list of those who pay this tribute to the genius of Mr. Story. I inclose a more formal letter of excuse to the committee."

"Having passed," says General Wilson, "by more than three winters, what the Psalmist calls 'the days of our years,' and escaped the 'labour and sorrow' that are foreboded to the strength that attains fourscore, Bryant continued to perform his daily editorial duties, to pursue his studies, and to give the world his much-prized utterances, without exhibiting any evidences of physical or mental decay, although, for a good part of half a century he was under whip and spur, with the daily press for ever, as Scott expressed it, 'clattering and thundering at his heels.' On the evening of January 31st, 1878, he walked out on the wildest night of the winter, when a blinding snow-storm kept many younger men at home, to address a meeting of the American Geographical Society, and to take part in the cordial welcome extended to the Earl of Dufferin, then the genial and accomplished Governor-General of Canada. When the president of the society sent for a carriage and urged the aged poet, at the close of the meeting, to make use of it, he sturdily refused, saying that he preferred to walk home.

"Among Mr. Bryant's latest utterances was the following noble Ode, written for Washington's birth-day, February 22nd, 1878, in *The Sunday School Times:*—

"'Pale is the February sky,
And brief the mid-day's sunny hours;
The wind-swept forest seems to sigh
For the sweet time of leaves and flowers.

"'Yet has no month a prouder day,
Not even when the summer broods
O'er meadows in their fresh array,
Or autumn tints the glowing woods.

"'For this chill season now again
Brings, in its annual round, the morn
When, greatest of the sons of men,
Our glorious Washington was born.

"'Lo, where, beneath an icy shield,
Calmly the mighty Hudson flows!

By snow-clad fell and frozen field
Broadening the lordly river goes.

"'The wildest storm that sweeps through space,
And rends the oak with sudden force,
Can raise no ripple on his face
Or slacken his majestic course.

"'Thus, 'mid the wreck of thrones, shall live
Unmarred, undimmed, our hero's fame,
And years succeeding years shall give
Increase of honours to his name.'"

In reference to this last poem the Rev. Henry W. Bellows said:—

"Bryant's genius sprang complete into public notice when he was still in his teens; it retained its character for sixty years almost unchanged, and its latest products are marked with the essential qualities that gave him his first success. Never, perhaps, was there an instance of such precocity in point of wisdom and maturity as that which marked 'Thanatopsis,' written at eighteen, or of such persistency in judgment, force, and melody as that exhibited in his last public ode, written at eighty-three, on occasion of Washington's last birth-day. Between these two bounds lies one even path, high, finished, faultless, in which comes a succession of poems, always meditative, always steeped in the love and knowledge of nature, always pure and melodious, always stamped with his sign-manual of flawless taste and gem-like purity—but never much aside from the line and direction that marked the first outburst and the last flow of his genius."

"Still later (May 15th, 1878) Mr. Bryant wrote, at Roslyn, the following characteristic sentiment contributed to a Decoration Day number of *The Recorder:*—

"'In expressing my regard for the memory of those who fell in the late civil war, I cannot omit to say that, for one result of what they did and endured—namely, the extinction of slavery in this great republic—they deserve the imperishable gratitude of mankind. Their memory will survive many

thousands of the generations of spring flowers which men will gather to-day on their graves. Nay, they will not be forgotten while the world has a written history.'"

In the summer of 1878, less than a month before his death, the following letter of apology for absence, written by Bryant to the Rev. Dr. John H. Vincent, and relating to the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, was read aloud at Fairpoint, New York, and is valuable as setting forth the poet's mature views as to the relative positions of science and religion:—

"New York, May 18, 1878.

"My dear Sir,—I cannot be present at the meeting called to organize the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, but I am glad that such a movement is on foot, and wish it the fullest success. There is an attempt to make science, or a knowledge of the laws of the material universe, an ally of the school which denies a separate spiritual existence and a future life; in short, to borrow of science weapons to be used against Christianity. The friends of religion, therefore, confident that one truth never contradicts another, are doing wisely when they seek to accustom the people at large to think and to weigh evidence, as well as to believe. By giving a portion of their time to a vigorous training of the intellect and a study of the best books, men gain the power to deal satisfactorily with questions with which the mind might otherwise become bewildered. It is true that there is no branch of human knowledge so important as that which teaches the duties that we owe to God and to each other; and that there is no law of the universe—sublime and wonderful as it may be—so worthy of being fully known as the law of love, which makes him who obeys it a blessing to his species, and the universal observance of which would put an end to a larger proportion of the evils which affect mankind; yet is a knowledge of the results of science, and such of its processes as are most open to the popular mind, important for the purpose of showing the different spheres occupied by science and religion, and preventing

the inquirer from mistaking their divergence from each other for opposition.

"I perceive this important advantage in the proposed organization, namely, that those who engage in it will mutually encourage each other. It will give the members a common pursuit, which always begets a feeling of brotherhood; they will have a common topic of conversation and discussion, and the consequence will be that many who, if they stood alone, might soon grow weary of the studies which are recommended to them, will be incited to perseverance by the interest which they see others taking in them. It may happen in rare instances that a person of eminent mental endowments, which otherwise might have remained uncultivated and unknown, will be stimulated in this manner to diligence, and put forth unexpected powers, and passing rapidly beyond the rest become greatly distinguished, and take a place among the luminaries of the age. I shall be interested in watching, during the little space of life that may yet remain to me, the progress and results of the plan which has drawn from me this letter.—I am, sir, very truly yours, W. C. BRYANT."

Bryant was long associated with the late Evert A. Duychinck—editor of the *Cyclopedia of American Literature*, and a most accomplished essayist and critic—in editing a sumptuous edition of Shakspere. It was completed before his death, and was then only waiting for better times, to be published in four elegant quarto volumes.

In addition to the works already enumerated as being edited by Bryant at the time of his death, he was writing an introduction to a work called *Thoughts on a Religious Life*, by the Rev. Joseph Alden, principal of the State Normal School at Albany, who was an old and early friend of the poet. Bryant left it unfinished, so that several gaps remain unsupplied. This was the friend who, unknown to Bryant, had compiled the admirable text-

book for schools called *Studies in Bryant*, and who, on its completion, got the venerable poet to write the introduction, which is as masterly as it is modest.

The following reliable, conclusive, and satisfactory testimony, which perfectly accords with that of so many others, is borne, by an old acquaintance of the poet's, to the sure ground of his hope:—

"I saw Mr. Bryant for the last time a few weeks before his death. Reference having been made to the close of life, I asked him if the sentiment expressed in one of his poems was habitual with him. He repeated the passage alluded to,—

"'Can neither wake the dread, nor the longing, to depart;'

and he said the sentiment was habitual, and then, with great humility and simplicity, expressed his entire reliance upon Christ for salvation."

CHAPTER XIV.

1878: Mazzini Inauguration Day—Sad Accident to Bryant—Illness—Death—Funeral—Critical Estimates.

Mazzini Bust Inauguration in Central Park—Bryant's Conversation with General Wilson before and after the Oration—Sad Accident to Bryant—His Illness—Death—Funeral Service—Bellows' Address—Burial at Roslyn in June—Surviving Relatives—Jones' Critique on Bryant and some of his Contemporaries—Ray Palmer on the Poet—Osgood's Idea of a Fitting Memorial—Bigelow on Bryant's Genius, Self-restraint, and Noble Character—Both Bryant's Life and Poems well worthy of Careful Study.

Bryant, as we have seen, was frequently called upon to deliver addresses and orations on public occasions—chiefly to honour the memory of distinguished men. The last occasion on which he so appeared was on the 29th of May, 1878, when the bronze bust of Mazzini, the Italian patriot, was unveiled in Central Park.

Bryant drove to the park in his carriage early in the afternoon; but, for the sad event of that day, we cannot do better than quote from the narrative of his friend, General Wilson, who was with him, and who has given us an account of the proceedings, in his memoir of Bryant, prefixed to the *Library of Poetry and Song:*—

"I met Mr. Bryant in the park," says General Wilson, "about half an hour before the commencement of the ceremonies, conversing with him during that time, and again for a similar period after those ceremonials were concluded. . . .

"At the proper time Mr. Bryant took his seat on the platform—for he had been standing or seated under the welcome shade of adjoining elms—and presently he proceeded with the delivery of the last of a long series of scholarly addresses delivered in New York during the past thirty years. As I gazed on the majestic man, with his snow-white hair and flowing beard, his small, keen, but gentle blue eye, his light but firm lithe figure, standing so erect and apparently with undiminished vigour, enunciating with such distinctness, I thought of what Napoleon said of another great singer who, like our American poet, reached an advanced age to which but few attain, and which was equally true of Bryant: 'Behold a man!'

"The delivery of the oration, which affords most interesting evidence of the enthusiasm and mental energy of its aged author, it is to be feared, drew too heavily on the poet's failing powers. It was uttered with an unusual depth of feeling, and for the first time in his public addresses, so far as I am aware, he hesitated and showed some difficulty in finding his place in the printed slip which was spread before him, and in proceeding with his remarks. During the delivery of his speech he was slightly exposed to the hot sun, an umbrella being held over his

"'Good gray head, which all men knew,'

till he reached his peroration, when he stepped from under its shelter, and, looking up at the bust, delivered with power and

great emphasis, while exposed to the sun, the concluding paragraph of his address :—'Image of the illustrious champion of civil and religious liberty, cast in enduring bronze to typify the imperishable renown of thy original! Remain for ages yet to come where we place thee, in this resort of millions; remain till the day shall dawn—far distant though it may be —when the rights and duties of human brotherhood shall be acknowledged by all the races of mankind!'

"At the conclusion Mr. Bryant was loudly applauded, and resuming his seat again on the platform, he remained an interested listener to the address in Italian which followed his. At the close of the ceremonies, and when the poet was left almost alone on the platform, he took my offered arm to accompany me to my home, saying, that he was perfectly able to walk there, or, indeed, to his own house in Sixteenth Street. Before proceeding, I again proposed that we should take a carriage, when the poet said, in a determined manner, 'I am not tired, and prefer to walk.' As we set off, I raised my umbrella to protect him from the sun, when he said, in a most decided tone, 'Don't hold that umbrella up on my account; I like the warmth of the sunshine.' He was much interested in a fine flock of sheep, together with the shepherd and his intelligent Scotch collie, that he observed as we passed across the green.

"Mr. Bryant alluded to the death of Lord John Russell the day before, and asked if I had ever met him or heard him speak in public, adding :—'For a statesman, he devoted a good deal of time to literature, and he appears to have been a man of respectable talents. How old was he?' 'Eighty-six.' 'Why, he was older than I am; but I expect to beat that and to live as long as my friend Dana, who is ninety-one.' 'Have you any theory as to the cause of your good health?' 'Oh, yes,' he answered; 'it is all summed up in one word—moderation. As you know, I am a moderate eater and drinker, moderate in my work, as well as in my pleasures, and I believe the best way to preserve the mental and physical faculties is to keep them employed. Don't allow them to rust.' 'But surely,' I added, 'there is no moderation in a man of eighty-three, after

walking more than two miles, mounting eight or nine pairs of stairs to his office.' 'Oh,' he merrily replied, 'I confess to the two or three miles down-town, but I do not often mount the stairs; and if I do sometimes, when the elevator is not there, I do not see that it does me any harm. I can walk and work as well as ever, and have been at the office to-day, as usual.' . . .

"Passing the Halleck statue, Mr. Bryant paused to speak of it, of other statues in similar sitting posture, and of Halleck himself and his genius, for several minutes.

"Still continuing to lean on my arm, he asked my little daughter, whose hand he had held and continued to hold during our walk, if she knew the names of the robins and sparrows that attracted his attention, and also the names of some flowering shrubs that we passed. Her correct answers pleased him, and he then inquired if she had ever heard some little verses about the bobolink. She answered yes, and that she also knew the poet who wrote them. This caused him much amusement, and he said, 'I think I shall have to write them out for you. Mary, do you know the name of that tree with the pretty blue flowers?' he asked, and as she did not know, he told her that it was 'called the *Paulownia imperialis*—a hard name for a little girl to remember; it was named in honour of a princess, and was brought from Japan.'

"Arriving at the Morse statue at the Seventy-second Street gate, we stopped, and he said:—'This recalls to my mind a curious circumstance. You remember Launt Thompson's bust which the commissioners refused to admit in the park, on the ground that I was living? Well, soon after, this statue of Morse was placed here, although he was alive, and [laughingly] I was asked to deliver the address on the occasion of its unveiling, which I did.' 'Do you like your bust?' 'Yes, I think it is a good work of art, and the likeness is pleasing and satisfactory, I believe, to my friends.' 'Which do you think your best portrait?' 'Unlike Irving, I prefer the portraits made of me in old age. Of the earlier pictures, I presume the best are Inman's and my friend Durand's, which you perhaps remember hangs in the parlour at Roslyn.'

"As we approached my house, about four o'clock, Mr.

Bryant was recalling the scenes of the previous year on the occasion of President Hayes's first visit to New York, and he was still, I think, cheerfully conversing on that subject as we walked up arm in arm, and all entered the vestibule. Disengaging my arm, I took a step in advance to open the inner door, and during those few seconds, without the slightest warning of any kind, the venerable poet, while my back was turned, dropped my daughter's hand and fell suddenly backward through the open outer door, striking his head on the steps. I turned just in time to see the silvered head striking the stone, and, springing to his side, hastily raised him up. He was unconscious, and I supposed that he was dead. Ice-water was immediately applied to his head, and, with the assistance of a neighbour's son and the servants, he was carried into the parlour and laid unconscious at full length on the sofa. He soon moved, became restless, and in a few minutes sat up and drank the contents of a goblet filled with iced sherry, which partially restored him, and he asked, with a bewildered look, 'Where am I? I do not feel at all well. Oh, my head! my poor head!' accompanying the words by raising his right hand to his forehead. After a little, at his earnest request, I accompanied him to his own house, and, leaving him in charge of his niece, went for his family physician, Dr. John F. Gray."

On reaching his home in West Sixteenth Street, Bryant had mechanically put his hand into his pocket, and was able to open the door with his latch-key. He called for his niece, Miss Fairchild, to whom General Wilson explained what had occurred. He was put to bed, but in a few hours became unconscious. General Wilson sent us the following memorandum in pencil, written on the day of the accident:—"I think the sudden faintness that caused him to fall was probably owing to the heat of the sun on his bare head, combined with the excitement and fatigue of the occasion. I have not for years seen him more cheerful and tranquil than as we walked

together through the park; and although he leaned somewhat heavily on my arm, he did not complain of feeling exhausted." During the remaining thirteen days of his life he occasionally rallied sufficiently to speak, but was merely able to give a few simple directions. Paralysis of the right side supervened, and, his life gradually ebbing away, on Wednesday, June 12th, 1878, at twenty-five minutes before six o'clock in the morning, when asleep, he peacefully passed away to the realms of light.

On Friday morning, June 14th, his remains were removed to All Souls' Church, where the services, in accordance with his oft-expressed wish, were marked by extreme simplicity.

The Rev. Dr. Bellows pronounced a funeral oration. The church was crowded with an immense audience, among which were the most distinguished men and women of New York; an unusually large number of venerable men; also delegates and representatives from the leading clubs, societies, and press organizations of the country; all were assembled, from far and near, to pay this their last tribute of respect.

At the close of the address the choir sang Bryant's own hymn beginning,

"Deem not that they are blest alone,"

to Beethoven's music—the tune called "Germany." The Lord's Prayer was then recited by the whole congregation, and the mass of the people dispersed, while "The Dead March in Saul" was being played on the organ.

"The coffin, which was covered with black cloth and mounted with silver, bore a plate with the inscription, 'William Cullen Bryant. Born November 3, 1794. Died June 12, 1878.' Resting on the coffin was a spray of palm leaves, fastened together by a knot of white ribbon."

It, and a few friends, were conveyed by a special train to Roslyn, Long Island, where it was placed in a hearse and borne to the cemetery—followed by the mourners, the relatives first and friends after, most of them choosing to walk—to be laid by the side of her whom he had loved below, and had now rejoined above.

Dr. Bellows, standing at the head of the grave, read a few of Bryant's own poems which had been lovingly selected by the poet's brother as suitable for the occasion. The extracts were from the "Thanatopsis," beginning with the familiar verse,—

"So live that when thy summons comes to join,"

and from the poems entitled, "To a Water-fowl," "A Hymn to Death," "The Battlefield," "Waiting by the Gate," the stanzas prefixed to "Thanatopsis" when first published, "The Journey of Life," "Poem Addressed to Mrs. Bryant in her Last Illness," "The Life that is," "October, 1866," "November 3, 1861," and "The Two Travellers."

"The close of the address was a charge to the villagers present to 'cherish the precious heritage of dust,' and the assurance that in the future the best fame of Roslyn would be that it is Bryant's resting-place. The Scriptural quotations of the Episcopal burial services were read; a brief prayer was made, and the coffin was lowered into its place. Then a number of little children belonging to the Sunday-school of the village stepped forward, and, walking around the grave, threw flowers into it, until the box inclosing the coffin was covered. Several branches of the century plant, sent by the Century Club, were laid with the flowers. This closed the burial services, and the mourners slowly left the cemetery."

Bryant had, in his lines to "June," written half a century before, expressed a desire that, when the end

came, he might, unostentatiously, be laid in his final resting-place, in that month of green leaves and flowers, and the poet's wish had now been gratified. General Wilson writes:—

"It was indeed a glorious day, and the daisies were dancing and glimmering over the fields as the poet's family, a few old friends, and the villagers saw him laid in his last resting-place at Roslyn, after a few words fitly spoken by his pastor, and beheld his coffin covered with roses and other summer flowers by a little band of country children, who gently dropped them as they circled round the poet's grave. This act completed, we left the aged minstrel amid the melody dearest of all to him in life—the music of the gentle June breezes murmuring through the tree-tops, from whence also came the songs of summer birds."

And Bigelow has said:—

"On one of the loveliest days of flowery June that the sun of Long Island ever shed its golden light upon, his mortal remains were consigned to their last resting-place beside the tomb of her whose disembodied spirit,

"'Lovelier in heaven's sweet climate, yet the same,'

his had already joined. He seemed to leave this world with no wish, no ambition unsatisfied. His life showed no trace of disappointment. He had never allowed himself to desire what it did not please the Master to send to him, nor to repine for anything that was denied him. 'Thy will be done,' was the daily prayer not only of his lips but of his heart and life."

Of Bryant's immediate relatives, only two of his brothers survive out of a family of seven; these are Arthur, and John Howard Bryant. They were both farmers, and are men well-to-do, "conspicuous for a sturdy purpose, and a certain inflexible Puritan honesty." John is a man of refined taste, and in his younger days wrote some good

verses which have been widely copied, and have found their way into book collections. His present residence at Princeton, Illinois, was a gift from his deceased brother.

Bryant also left two daughters, the elder of whom is the wife of Parke Godwin.

On the poet's death, the tributes paid to his worth by the press were immediate, warm, and sincere. His memory is deservedly enshrined in that universal esteem and admiration which his noble life, as well as his literary achievements, had won for him. The man was greater than the scholar, and his character was as fine as his genius.

The late venerable Dana wrote, to General James Grant Wilson, the following touching letter of inquiry:—

"My dear General,—When the news of the accident reached Boston, I was ill and on my bed. My friends, fearing the effect which making known to me the condition of my dear old friend might have upon me, said nothing about it till the evening before he passed away from us. The last of my early friends is taken away from me, and left me an old, feeble man; but not for long—I must soon follow him. Will you, my dear sir, write me what you can of the particulars? Every incident will be precious to me.

"My son[1] and I thank you for writing him to come to your house on this mournful occasion. He had the hope for an hour or two that he might be with you, but it was not to be. I have written all that I have strength for. My poor head! —With sincere regards, RICHD. H. DANA."

"Boston, No. 43 Chesnut Street,
"June 17, 1878."

William Alfred Jones, a distinguished American essayist and critic, in a letter, addressed to General Wilson, and

[1] A distinguished lawyer in New York, and the well-known author of *Two Years before the Mast.* An important case unfortunately prevented him from being present at Bryant's funeral to represent his father.—A. J. S.

kindly placed at our service, writes thus discriminatingly of Bryant and some of his contemporaries:—

"Bryant seemed to me to rank next to Wordsworth in English literature in his peculiar walk, his truest disciple and 'eldest apprentice in (his) school of art.' In our American Parnassus he is first of his class, and that the highest. Without the sustained power and deep passion of Dana, equally with him he is supreme in sentiment and reflection, and superior in extent and variety in his rural pictures. Without the lyric fire and brilliant fancy and versatile genius of Halleck—as a poet, as a classical scholar, an orator and prose writer of the first class—Bryant occupied a position to which Halleck had no pretensions. As a man—his purity and elevation of character, his activity and energy, physical and mental, his course of life, regular, exact, harmonious (of itself a poem), were patent to all who ever knew, or had even heard of him."

Dr. Ray Palmer, in this same connection, has well said:—

"Its great authors are the glory of a nation. A man in whom true genius is developed and made practical is a mighty power. When such a man consecrates his rare gifts to good and useful ends, when he gives himself to the work of contributing to the elevation, refinement, and happiness of his fellows, and through a course of years reaches them with fresh and stimulating thoughts, making them half forget their cares and sorrows, and moving them to love what is purest, and to aspire to what is highest and most worthy, he deserves to be regarded as a benefactor of the world. His influence reaches far beyond the limits within which it is distinctly recognized; and like fragrant odours that fill all the air, it refreshes thousands and makes their lives richer and better than they could otherwise have been. No people, therefore, are true to themselves who do not reverently cherish and honour the names of those who have entertained and instructed them; who do not sacredly guard their reputations and endeavour to perpetuate their power."

The Rev. Dr. Osgood, in his address at the Memorial Meeting of the Goethe Club, said:—

"His social life deepened with advancing years, and in his enthusiasm for public interest and associations during the last twenty years he seemed to have a second youth, more susceptible and sometimes more impulsive than his first youth. In fact, a new bloom seemed to be budding within him, and to make us sometimes think that this century plant was waiting for the hundred years to bring out its final and full flowering.

"The man himself is in his works. His gentleness was mated with strength that marked his character and looked out from his face. He was a very mild, unpretending man, and not commanding in stature, yet it was hard to resist the impression of his having a certain grandeur of form as of spirit, and artists generally overdrew his figure and his face.

"If I were asked to sketch a memorial for Bryant's memory I would not presume to do it. I would venture upon a hint to the competent artist. I would say, put something of Delphi and Jerusalem into your tribute to this Puritan Greek. Take from the Delphic porch the head of Homer and these two inscriptions:—

"'No excess,'
"'Know thyself,'

and then put a fitting statue in front. What shall this be? Not the Pythoness with the tripod from the cave beneath, where intoxicating gases breathed inebriation that was miscalled inspiration. Not that figure nor that earthly art, but put our poet himself there on a granite rock from his native hills, with one hand outstretched towards the fields and hills and waters, and the other lifted up and holding a scroll of the everlasting gospel and showing plainly the words of Christ, 'The truth shall make you free.' So Delphi and Jerusalem, Greece and Judea, meet together in this man and give him hold on his country and the world.

"Poet, patriot, man, friend of us all, father of our letters, what shall we say as we part? Farewell for ever? No; wel-

come for ever! Welcome to your lasting place in the love and honour of your countrymen. Welcome to your home in the kingdom of God, on earth and in heaven."

And his editorial associate, John Bigelow, thus concluded his admirable address before the Century Club:—

"Those who only knew him in his later years would scarcely believe that he had been endowed by nature with a very quick and passionate temper. He never entirely overcame it, but he held every impulse of his nature to such a rigorous accountability that few have ever suspected the struggles with which he purchased the self-control which constituted one of the conspicuous graces of his character. Bryant had his faults, but he made of them agents of purification. He learned from them humility and faith; a wise distrust of himself and an unfaltering trust in Him through whose aid he was strengthened to keep them in abeyance. They were the tears of angels which he converted into pearls.

"It was this constant and successful warfare upon every unworthy and degrading propensity that sought an asylum in his heart, that made him such a moral force in the country, that invested any occasion to which he lent his presence with an especial dignity, that gave to his personal example a peculiar power and authority. No one could be much in the society of Bryant without feeling more respect for himself, without being conscious that his better nature had been awakened to a higher activity; without an increased reluctance to say or do anything which Bryant himself under similar circumstances would probably not have said or done.

"Though not at all given to speak of himself or of his own habits and methods of life, the radiance of his example had a peculiar efficacy. Like the shadow of St. Peter, upon whomsoever it fell it seemed to exert a healing influence. In that bright example he still lives. To a life so full of wisdom and virtue, so complete and symmetrical, there is change, there is growth, there is immortality, but there is no death. The attributes of God are imperishable."

Several odes, worthy of the poet's memory, have been written by Stedman, Stoddard, and others, which, but for space, we would have quoted here, as a fitting close for this volume.

Now—bidding readers adieu!—we would, once more, earnestly commend both the example of the venerable Bryant's pure and noble life, and the teaching of his elevating poems—with their fresh love of nature, perduring human interest, purity of thought, musical expression, simplicity, calm reflective wisdom, and spirituality of tone—to the careful study of all, young or old, who can appreciate that high order of genius wherein goodness, truth, and beauty, naturally blending together, are presented, with consummate and exquisite art,

"True to the kindred points of heaven and home!"

THE END.

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